

# **QUEER TIME & SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL WRITING**

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**DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I, Sophie Robinson, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# ABSTRACT

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## QUEER TIME AND SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL WRITING

The aim of this practice-based PhD is to develop the theory and practice of a queer poetics. In this thesis I will be looking at the work of four contemporary experimental writers: Abigail Child, Dodie Bellamy, Caroline Bergvall and kari edwards. Specifically, I will be addressing representations of time and space in contemporary queer poetic practice.

Chapter One draws on recent, queer revisionings of temporality in order to examine representations of time in the work of Abigail Child and Dodie Bellamy. I will particularly be focusing on the relationship between acts of temporal disruption and queer history, arguing that modes of experimental poetic practice might lend themselves well to representations of queer temporality.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the relationship between queer theory, phenomenology and experimental writing. Through close readings of Caroline Bergvall and kari edwards alongside these theoretical texts, I will propose that forms of queer space are generated by these writers. I will argue that this is achieved through an innovative approach to book and page space, and through the introduction of queer bodies into public and private hegemonic spaces.

Alongside my close readings of these four writers, I will be discussing my development of a queer poetic practice in *SHE!*, the manuscript which accompanies this thesis. In Chapter One, I will discuss my use of collage, genre and repetition to create anachronistic and looping forms of queer time. In Chapter Two, I will discuss my use of collage to queer both the material site of the book and the textual representations of domesticity that occur in the text.

Finally, I will propose that these queer tactics of writing might be linked to a wider political project of subcultural political action; that the queer 'other' can be seen as a model for resisting hegemonic control, and that queer subcultures can suggest alternative ways of being in the world, outside of the realms of patriarchal, capitalist and heterosexual hegemony.

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## INTRODUCTION :

### TOWARDS A POETICS OF QUEER TIME AND SPACE

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The spaces get occupied. The not-previous becomes present, is named, to eat away at the boundaries of the art.

— Abigail Child, *A Motive for Mayhem*

This thesis takes as its starting point Judith Halberstam's 'ambitious claim that there is such a thing as "queer time" and "queer space"'.<sup>1</sup> Halberstam argues that through opposing hegemonic constructions of time and space, alternate conceptions of these things might appear within queer lives. In both my research and my creative practice, I am interested in the implications of this claim for writing. It seems to me that there might well be a productive relationship between Halberstam's definition of queer counter-hegemony as to do with 'willfully eccentric modes of being' (p.1) and the tradition of avant-garde, linguistically experimental literature which both my academic research and my creative practice are concerned. I wish to focus on the formal construction of experimental poetry and prose poetry, using sexuality and gender construction as the lens with which to examine how formal techniques in writing can *enact* and *perform* difference, and how that performance critiques existing literary forms. Furthermore, I will argue that this critique extends by implication to the normative modes of being and identification from which these traditional literary forms evolve. Finally, I will demonstrate how these works create temporary but visionary alternative

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgendered Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p. 1

models of representation and potential sites for existence through generating forms of queer time and space. Each text forms a dialogical relationship between the appropriation and critique of both textual and cultural forms of hegemony. The texts I discuss offer a revolutionary, if necessarily temporary, model of queer artistic and political praxis through the generation of 'queer times' and 'queer spaces' within their writing.

Since its inception in the early 1990s, queer theory has provided useful philosophical and cultural models for ways of looking at gender and sexuality as contingent, political subject positions. Annamarie Jagose defines 'queer' as 'an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies'.<sup>2</sup> She goes on to state that '[b]roadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire' (p. 3). The move away from a fixed and binary set of gender and sexuality identities (Jagose importantly defines queer identities as a set of marginal *self*-identifications) towards a more relative, mobile and oppositional group politicizes sexuality as a tool for critique and enables a more dynamic discussion and thinking through of the available models for living. Such a definition is useful in terms of conceptualizing the representation of subjectivity in writing: there seems to be a close relationship between the contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), p. 1

experimental writing being produced in the UK and North America today and the view of identity presented in queer theory. Formally, the terms used to describe the work discussed within this thesis (including my own creative practice) – ‘avant garde’, ‘linguistically innovative’, ‘experimental’ – all indicate a future-orientated, counter-hegemonic and explicitly political mode of text production which seems to be in many ways in line with Jagose’s definition of what it means to be queer: queer is less about an essential being but rather what that being is constructed in opposition to. As such, both queer identity and experimental writing (and, by extension, *particularly* queer experimental writing) have the ability to posit alternatives to hegemony through a deconstruction and critique of the status quo, whether that’s the illusion of compulsory heterosexuality in mainstream culture or the linear singularity of meaning promoted in mainstream literature.

Before outlining the structure of this thesis and my creative practice, I would like to outline my definition of what queerness might consist of, and the scope of philosophy and cultural theory with which my practice and research engages. Whilst I embrace the term ‘queer’ as a shifting term and political position which might include any non-normative sexuality or gender identity, I am wary of foregrounding it at the expense of feminist and gender theory. Women have been marginalized within the history of homosexuality. Jagose notes that ‘female homosexuality does not occupy the same historic position as male homosexuality in the discourses of law and medicine’ (p.13), due to its relative invisibility as a legitimate category of sexuality. The Labouchère

Amendment of 1885,<sup>3</sup> which introduced a law against homosexual activity between men but not between women (and later lead to the incarceration of Oscar Wilde) has meant that 'partly as a consequence of its different relation to criminalization...female homosexuality took much longer than male homosexuality to constitute the basis of a communal, subcultural identity' (p. 13).

Whilst key events in recent history, namely the Stonewall riots, the AIDS pandemic, and Section 28,<sup>4</sup> have brought about a coalitional politics between minority groups, there is still a very real and tangible difference in attitudes towards gendered bodies, which might be overlooked under the umbrella of 'queerness' (whilst simultaneously privileging homosexual *male* experience above others). Suzanna Danuta Walters has similar reservations about the power of 'queer' to erase gender difference:

queerness is theorized as somehow beyond gender, a vision of a sort of transcendent, polymorphous perversity deconstructing as it slips from one desiring/desired object to the other. But this forgets the very real and felt experience of gender that women, particularly, live with quite explicitly. Indeed, one could argue that this is really the dividing line around different notions of queer: to what extent do theorists argue *queer* as a term beyond (or through) gender?<sup>5</sup>

My use of the word 'queer' within this thesis bears these differences of experience in mind. Whilst investigating slippages of gender and non-

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<sup>3</sup> The Labouchère Amendment of 1885 outlawed 'gross acts of indecency between men' and was repealed in 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Section 28 was introduced by the British government in 1988 as a reaction to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The clause forbade the intentional promotion of homosexuality by Local Authorities, and was repealed in 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Suzanna Danuta Walters, 'From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace' in *Queer Theory*, Ed. Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 13

normative sexualities, I wish to be careful not to ignore the real politics of gender difference. The form of queerness I discuss here is a queerness argued *through* gender. This is one of the reasons I have chosen to focus on female writers and artists, and to include in my queer readings and practice recent gender and feminist theory.

Mary E. Galvin's *Queer Poetics* overlaps with the research interests of this thesis. Galvin states that

[s]ince the mid-1970s, a revolution of poetics and consciousness and knowledge has been happening within the lesbian community, and it is continuing at full strength today. It is a poetics of disruption, of crossing boundaries, of dismantling categorical distinctions. In speaking of and from our multiple differences [...] it is a poetics that embraces and fosters a transformative vision of the complexity in the world. Our poets are our theorists – theorists of language and form [...] theorists of the interrelationship of language, consciousness, sexuality, and social control, theorists of the deconstruction of categorical thinking, theorists of gender and identity and the unconscious.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst I don't entirely sympathize with Galvin's biographical readings of the work of female poets, I think that increased attention to queer experimental writing is politically important, and, like Galvin, I will be focusing on female-identified queer<sup>7</sup> bodies and lives. I will examine and posit queer tactics of (re)writing time and space, a language practice that might, as Galvin argues, function *as* theory. Through a queering of temporal and spatial aspects of

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<sup>6</sup> Mary E. Galvin, *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1999), p. 3

<sup>7</sup> kari edwards identified as queer and transgender, and fluctuated between female and gender-neutral pronouns. For the purpose of continuity in this thesis, and in accordance with biographical material and literary criticism from the time of the publication of *iduna*, I will be using the female pronoun to discuss edwards' work.



writing, I will posit that the texts discussed in this thesis can provide textual models of resistance to heteronormative, hegemonic social control.

Queer theory has been dogged by an inability to define itself categorically. As Jagose writes, it 'evades programmatic description'.<sup>8</sup> Queer theory marks part of a poststructuralist move away from identity politics as fixed positions, and towards a general view of identity as culturally constructed and performative, rejecting notions of authenticity of self. It follows, therefore, that queerness is a minority position with the fluidity to be shifted to where it is politically, culturally, artistically and socially needed. Rather than becoming a part of an anchored and binary system, it can be used as a useful and coalitional term for any minority gender or sexuality. As Jagose states, '[b]y refusing to crystallize in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal' (p. 99). My preference for the word queer above lesbian, gay, transgender or any other term with which to describe a gender/sexual minority body, despite its tendency to idealistically smooth over the everyday lived experience of the markers of social bias, lies with this political malleability of queerness. By moving beyond identity politics in this way, different kinds of literary texts become available; one may read and write beyond the assertion and description of a biographical identity, and explore the political, artistic and social possibilities that lie outside of heterosexuality and binary gender identities. Through this shift which queerness permits, other aspects of the textual can become a focus: who

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<sup>8</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p. 97

writes, why, and how, are all questions which can become refigured within contemporary queer writing.

There are dangers within this shift, though; Monique Wittig warns that 'minority writers are menaced by the meaning even while they are engaged in formal experimentation: what for them is only a theme in their work, a formal element, imposes itself as meaning *only*, for straight readers'.<sup>9</sup> Even experimental work, then, can be reinterpreted as 'telling', as biographical, and its conceptual value shaken off in favour of a cult or minority label. In the context of this warning from Wittig, it seems to me that strict impositions of form and process, which relate to the politically and culturally specific position of queer from which I wish to write, must be put in place in order to create an innovative and experimental body of work which would self-consciously resist such a reduction. In addition to positing a queer methodology of making and reading texts, my approach takes the form of a social praxis. I aim to produce an ethically aware body of work; to negotiate the space between ideology and lived experience. Wittig writes that

[w]hen we use the overgeneralized term "ideology" to designate all the discourses of the dominating group, we relegate these discourses to the domain of Irreal Ideas; we forget the abstract and "scientific" discourses as well as by the discourses of the mass media. I would like to insist on the material oppression of individuals by discourses (p. 25).

I am interested in outlining and developing a creative practice which might affect the 'material (physical)' world as well as functioning as a queer ideology in themselves. In doing this, I wish to draw parallels between the temporal and

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<sup>9</sup> Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) p. 66

spatial limitations of literature and those of hegemonic culture. I will demonstrate the ways in which both function as forms of queer oppression, and how queer textual renegotiations of time and space in literature can also be read as sociopolitical acts which work to change the conditions of everyday life as well as pushing the limits of form and language within writing.

In discussing the relationship between queer identities, experimental writing and the politics of poetics, this thesis draws on several existing areas of research. Firstly, aspects of this research contribute to an existing field of queer literary studies. As I've discussed, this thesis hopes both to build upon and shift the focus of some existing, more biographically orientated, readings of queer poetics, particularly Galvin's important *Queer Poetics*. Over the course of the thesis I also draw upon the work of Judith Roof, particularly her queer readings of narrative fiction, in order to discuss the formation of queer time through narrative experimentation. I will also be examining how Heather Love, in her recent book *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, deals with 'backward' emotions and anachronisms in queer literary and cultural history. Secondly, my treatment of queer sexuality and gender identity within experimental writing draws heavily on the rich tradition of experimental feminist poetics. In Chapter Two, my reading of space in the work of Edwards and Bergvall has been heavily influenced by Rachel Blau du Plessis' analysis of Susan Howe's use of the page as a feminist palimpsest, loaded with forgotten histories.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rachel Blau du Plessis, *The Pink Guitar* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990)

In my discussion of queer time and space, my thesis and creative work also deal with concepts of time and space as historical and philosophical categories. Time and space are impossible to fully disimbricate from each other. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have attempted to discuss a range of what I consider to be techniques of a queer poetic practice in two halves: those that primarily concern the generation of ‘queer time’ and those that primarily produce forms of ‘queer space’. Whilst my usage of these two terms comes from recent literature that rethinks the categories of time and space from the perspective of queer theory, I am also aware that such literature is rooted in a rich history of Western philosophy. Immanuel Kant’s proposition, in *Critique of Pure Reason*, that ‘[s]pace is not an empirical concept which has been derived from outer experiences’,<sup>11</sup> and that, ‘[i]t is, therefore, solely from the human standpoint that we can speak of space, of extended things, etc.’ (p. 71), was a key starting point for my thinking around time and space in this thesis, as well as in my creative practice. It seemed to me that Kant’s emphasis on subjectivity within his definitions of time and space held potent possibilities for thinking about the ability of these concepts to be manipulated and rethought within creative practice. Equally, whilst Kant asserts that ‘[t]ime is a necessary representation that underlies all intuitions’ (pp. 74-5) and that ‘[i]n it alone is actuality of appearances possible at all’ (p. 75), he later states that ‘[t]ime is nothing but the form of inner sense, that is, of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state’ (p. 77). So, whilst he acknowledges the Newtonian position that time is an absolute, to the extent

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<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p. 68

that he believes it a necessary given in order for phenomena to occur, he qualifies this by also asserting that even though necessary, time is a relational concept to the extent that it is invented through a process of internal cognition, which is externalized and standardized through effects of sequencing and linearity. Such a position at once emphasizes the importance of both time and space as foundational elements of our understanding of the world, and allows us to think about the malleability of such concepts, through positing them as reliant on subjectivity. This makes way for more recent thinking around the concepts of time and space as being both regulating external forces upon notions of selfhood and identity, and as things which can be to some extent reconfigured through shifts in subjective understanding and representation.

This possibility of reconfiguration is the starting point of both Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* and Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*. Halberstam's text begins with the proposition that queer lives have the 'potential to open up new life narratives and alternate relations to time and space'<sup>12</sup> through the rejection of what she terms a heterosexual 'reproductive temporality' (p. 4). Similarly, Ahmed begins *Queer Phenomenology* by drawing on phenomenological concepts of bodily orientation and lived experience in the work of Kant, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in order to '[t]o pose the question of "the orientation" of "sexual orientation" as a phenomenological question'.<sup>13</sup> Whilst the scope of this thesis does not allow me to explore the genesis of contemporary queer

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<sup>12</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 2

<sup>13</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006) p. 1

writing on time and space within a wider philosophical tradition, I want particularly to highlight Kant's work as a philosophical underpinning of the contemporary queer theory upon which I draw. Kant's work marks a philosophical turn towards attention to subjective experience and construction of the concepts of time and space, and such a turn lends itself well to contemporary perspectives on gender and sexuality as malleable rather than polarized or absolute positions, allowing us to question how we construct ourselves within the world, how the structures of the world construct our sense of ourselves, and how a shift in either of these things might lead to a consequent shift in the other: if we choose to construct ourselves differently, how does this change the available external frameworks with which to view the world?

In my discussion of queer time, I will also be drawing on literary theory concerning the relationship between narrative and temporality. Paul Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, posits that 'time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience'.<sup>14</sup> However, thinking about the relationship between queer bodies, temporality and the avant garde tradition, I will be challenging the universality of Ricoeur's 'human', and exploring the positive potential of temporal and narrative disruption within Child and Bellamy, as well as in my own creative practice, in order to create forms of queer temporality. As examples of experimental writing, the texts I discuss in this thesis are all part of the avant-garde, neo-

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume One*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 3

modernist and postmodern traditions of temporal disjunction. The disruption and rearrangement of time and space are, of course, not limited to the area of queer poetics. Barrett Watten's *Total Syntax* outlines experimental writing's affiliation with temporal re-organization through denial of narrative or 'nonnarrative':

most innovative literature and art, from the avant-garde to postmodernism, is nonnarrative in some way; narrative, where it exists in much of this work, is suspended and displaced. As a result, time in modernist and postmodern art and writing is often organized in ways that are not dependent on narrative as formal guarantee of meaning or as necessary horizon of understanding.<sup>15</sup>

Sharon Cameron, in her discussion of temporality in Emily Dickinson's work, also outlines a key difference between representations of time in narrative and lyric modes, stating that 'the moment is to lyric what sequence is to the story'.<sup>16</sup> The lyric tradition, upon which all three works in Chapter One draw to some extent (by virtue of engaging in a poetic tradition, at the least), has the potential to defy an ordered temporality in favour of simultaneity and the sense of a continuous present. However, it is worth mentioning that, firstly, these works all deal with narrative conventions (primarily, those of film noir, pornography and pulp fiction) poetically, and therefore sit on the border between narrative and lyric. Secondly, as texts which form part of what Watten calls 'innovative literature', but also as texts which deal explicitly with gender sexuality as both a thematic and formal concern, these texts perform a more complex and direct reworking of temporality and linear narrative

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<sup>15</sup> Barrett Watten, *Total Syntax* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University press, 1985), p. 198

<sup>16</sup> Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 206

structures than could be labeled as ‘nonnarrative’. Rather than unproblematically bypassing narrative, as Watten seems to suggest, these texts interrogate and disrupt narrative in order to explore what linear narratives and the resulting ordered temporality they produce cannot represent, and what alternatives can be produced when queer bodies intervene within this ordered temporality.

In Chapter One, I begin with a discussion of Judith Roof’s assertion that linear narrative construction in literature is related to timelines of heterosexual reproduction. Drawing upon Halberstam’s theory of queer subcultural temporality, I examine Abigail Child’s film *Mayhem* and poem ‘A Motive for Mayhem’, and Dodie Bellamy’s pornographic prose poetry collection *Cunt-Ups*. Through close readings, I wish to demonstrate the ways in which these texts explore and disrupt the conventions of narrative and genre. In doing so, I will argue that these texts generate forms of queer time which simultaneously critique the temporality of heterosexual hegemony, and also perhaps more accurately reflects both queer life experience and queer history. Looking at these texts alongside Love’s conception of queer history in *Feeling Backward*, as something queer writers must engage with by simultaneously memorializing and overcoming, I will be examining the construction of queer temporality through a tension between instances of remembering and forgetting.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the negotiation and manipulation of public and private space in Caroline Bergvall’s *Éclat* and kari edwards’ *iduna*. Drawing upon queer and phenomenological theory, I wish to argue that Bergvall and



Edwards use linguistic and visual techniques within their texts in order to question and subvert heterosexual notions of space, and to create alternative and necessarily temporary queer architectures posited as alternatives to hegemonic reproductive discourses. Finally, I will examine the necessary temporariness and contingency of queer times and spaces, and will posit that queer poetics might, rather than creating a queer utopian fantasy, need to acknowledge and express forms of political negativity in order to critique existing hegemonic discourse, and make the future possible through articulating the inadequacies, violence and pain of the queer past and present.

Through this strand of the thesis, I examine theses of remembering pain, forgetting histories and futures, negativity, passivity and unbecoming as queer political acts. In doing this, I will be drawing upon recent work by Halberstam and Love. *Feeling Backward*, *In a Queer Time and Place* and *The Queer Art of Failure* all build upon what Halberstam terms the ‘anti-social turn’<sup>17</sup> of queer studies, which has its genesis in Leo Bersani’s 1996 publication *Homos*. Bersani’s work marks a turn away from positivist and future-orientated community-orientated politics. He argues that there might be something intrinsically anti-social about the queer sex act, and that such anti-sociality, resulting in an undoing of subjectivity and a masochistic destruction of the social self, should be embraced. Lee Edelman, in *No Future*, pushes this thesis to its limit through emphatic denials of the future (through a refusal to procreate: ‘fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re

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<sup>17</sup> Judith Halberstam, ‘The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies’, *Graduate Journal of Social Science* Vol. 5 Issue 2 (2008) pp. 140 – 156 (p. 140)

collectively terrorized [...] fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop')<sup>18</sup> and an insistence on anti-politics. Whilst I acknowledge that aspects of this thesis owe a debt to the 'negative turn' effected by the work of Bersani and Edelman, I share the reservations of Love and Halberstam about denying notions of politics and sociality altogether. Love qualifies her affinity with Edelman by stating that '[a]lthough I share a deep skepticism with Edelman about political appeals to the future, I do not follow him in calling for the voiding of the future'.<sup>19</sup> Halberstam also articulates an important distinction between her work and the claims of apoliticism made by Bersani and Edelman: '[n]egativity might well constitute an antipolitics, but it should not register as apolitical'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Halberstam shares my reservation about this work: rooted in gay male sexuality, the work of both Bersani and Edelman can be seen to align women and reproduction with heteronormativity, and often fail to take into account other kinds of queer sexuality or gender identity. My choice to focus on the strands of negativity and backwardness developed by Halberstam and Love is because of their focus on the relationship between the negative or backward and political change (rather than apoliticism), and their taking-into-account of feminist, lesbian and transsexual identities within their usage of 'queer' and within the archive upon which they draw.

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<sup>18</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 29

<sup>19</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 22

<sup>20</sup> Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 108

Alongside the analysis of queer time and space in Child, Bellamy, Bergvall and Edwards, both chapters will discuss aspects of my creative practice. *SHE!* is a hybrid text which moves between poetry, prose, collage and image. I developed the project alongside my academic research, and see this thesis and my creative project as two strands of the same research, as each investigates ways of constructing queer time and space through experimental textual practice.

The piece began with an interest in queer history and subculture, a result of my reading of Halberstam. My readings of Child and Bellamy, specifically the way they deal with found material and rework the expectations of 'genre' within their writing, made me particularly interested in working with the concepts of narrative and genre. I began the project by reading mid-century lesbian pulp fiction. The birth of the genre of lesbian pulp fiction in the 1940s was a breaking point in the history of homosexuality. It was the moment queerness entered mainstream culture in the United States, due to the rise in publishing of cheap paperback originals, and an increased public interest in sexuality. As my research progressed, I became fascinated by the schismatic nature of the texts, and their sociological implications. On the one hand, what Yvonne Keller describes as a 'public lesbian culture'<sup>21</sup> was made available to the general populous for the first time, for consumption alongside other forms of titillating genre fiction. The mass-market paperback originals published by such presses as Fawcett Gold Medal opened the floodgates in

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<sup>21</sup> Yvonne Keller, 'Pulp Politics: Strategies of Vision in Pro-Lesbian Pulp Novels 1955-1965' in *The Queer Sixties*, Ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (New York and London: Routledge, 1999) p. 19

terms of what or whose stories could be told, and consequently there were compromises in the standards of both quality and censorship. Paperback original publishing not only opened the market to the derivative and second rate: marginal, subversive and controversial ideas also found expression there. It is through this loophole that the 'pro-lesbian subgenre' (p. 2) of texts – that is, texts written by lesbians and for lesbians rather than titillating and voyeuristic stories (what Marion Zimmer Bradley, in her bibliography of lesbian texts, labels as 'scv' or 'short course in voyeurism')<sup>22</sup> designed for a male heterosexual readership – were allowed into print.

On the other hand, what might seem to be an incredibly liberating moment in the history of minority literature is one that occurred within the strict confines of 1950s McCarthy-era society. Kate Adams describes the time as

a decade notable for its increasingly conservative attitude towards lesbianism in particular and women's sexual and social identity in general. In the early 1950s, a reactionary medical community damned Alfred Kinsey's sex research and his relatively progressive findings regarding the nature of women's sexual response and homoerotic experience. In the same years, the psychoanalytic establishment institutionalized a "sickness theory" model of homosexual behaviour which would affect the medical and cultural treatment, as well as the self-perception, of the lesbian for years to come.<sup>23</sup>

With this in mind, it seems even more revolutionary that these texts came to print at all. However, the confines of the time often meant that the genre of lesbian pulp fiction, no matter how pro-lesbian the text, had certain formulaic

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<sup>22</sup> Marion Zimmer Bradley and Gene Damon, *Checklist 1960: A complete, cumulative checklist of lesbian, variant and homosexual fiction, in English or available in English translation, with supplements of related material, for the use of collectors, students and librarians* (Rochester: Marion Zimmer Bradley, 1960) p. 4

<sup>23</sup> Kate Adams, 'Making the World Safe for the Missionary Position: Images of the Lesbian in Post-World War II America', in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, Ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990) p. 256

and conservative plotlines to adhere to. Lesbians were represented as deviant through the ending of the texts, the characters often either 'saved' from their homosexuality by men or ending up destitute. This was the same for male homosexual pulp (though this genre was more risqué and less popular) – as David Bergman writes, '[f]or quite some time I imagined that all pre-Stonewall novels followed an unbroken formula: boy meets boy, boy dies'.<sup>24</sup> Most texts also retained their appeal to a heterosexual male reader through the use of voyeurism and layers of gazing; what Laura Mulvey calls the 'male erotic privilege'<sup>25</sup> remains intact. Many of the erotic exchanges between women in the texts are filtered through a hidden male observer, and the integration of a male character into the action of the text made them 'safe'. Keller notes that this is partly a product of the political situation of the age: 'voyeurism in particular worked as a form of pleasure as reassurance over anxieties about social hierarchies; it reinstated the power of men over the object of their gaze....it also provided narrative structures in which to "show" lesbians'.<sup>26</sup>

Whilst this heterosexual framing of queer desire being 'shown' might seem to undermine any political power that these texts might have, the fact remains that attitudes towards the public existences of identities -- in whatever form -- became more permissive. The appearance of new cultural goods did not by itself occasion this shift. It was a part of a broader pattern of changes

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<sup>24</sup> David Bergman, 'The Cultural Work of Sixties Gay Pulp Fiction', in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Smith, p. 26

<sup>25</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989) p. 123

<sup>26</sup> Keller, 'Pulp Politics', p. 3

in the needs and anxieties of post-war America. The huge advances in scientific knowledge, the boom in economic growth and McCarthyist anti-communist paranoia were pervasive forces. Keller notes that ‘visual technologies of spying and surveillance dominated public life and discourse’ (p. 1), and with this in mind it is hardly surprising that voyeurism became such a popular framing device for these lesbian plots. The texts also provide a relief from the ‘hypermasculine machismo’<sup>27</sup> of 1950s popular culture. In this way, the genre provides valuable insights into society as a whole, rather than just the homosexual communities it represents. Stryker writes that ‘[h]omosexuality’s tendency to give queer authors an outsider’s perspective on mainstream society undoubtedly contributed to the mass-culture success of their work at a time when many people suffered from the alienations and dislocations of modernity’ (p. 15).

Queer subculture thus becomes a way of reading society as a whole, much like the suggestion that contemporary queer theory is not only an argument for queer legitimacy, but rather a study of gender and sexuality as a whole. Bearing these larger political possibilities of pulp in mind, I began to think about ways in which I could use both the schizophrenic and fragile public politics of queer identities in pulp fiction, and the formal and linguistic elements of the texts themselves, as part of a complex poetic practice in *SHE!*. I began my creative project with an interest in using the language, themes and aesthetics of the pulp tradition in order to excavate some of these complex politics at work in the novels themselves. I wanted to pay homage to

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<sup>27</sup> Stryker, *Queer Pulp*, p. 81

the pre-stonewall queer figures in the text: the invert, the butch dyke, the timid bisexual, the wayward woman. I also wanted to bring these interests into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by weaving in more contemporary language and themes, conflating contemporary queer culture with these closeted and kitsch mid-century stories. Whilst I began by using the many pulp novels I had used as a direct source material, through methods of collage and cut-ups, I also began parodying the language rather than lifting it directly. I also took the themes and aesthetics of the pulp and transferred them to a lyric practice at points. Later in the project, I work with descriptions of homes and architectures in the pulp text, alongside contemporary queer and anti-capitalist political themes, to create a queered 'home' space in the book. Through these many different techniques, I have inevitably inserted myself into the text, and one can read *SHE!* as a conversation between the many pulp texts I've read and worked with and my own queer, 21<sup>st</sup> century voice. In doing this, I hope to have produced a text that engages creatively and critically with this complex, fascinating genre, and to have paid homage to the writers of the texts I've worked with (I've included a bibliography of the pulp texts included in *SHE!*) whilst bringing this work into a contemporary landscape.

The first part of *SHE!* takes the form of a series of prose poems. I used pulp novels alongside more contemporary queer source materials in order to rework pulp narratives through a series of experimental prose 'portraits' of stock pulp fiction characters. In doing this, I was interested in addressing aspects of subcultural queer history, and creating a form of queer time through disrupting traditional expectations attached to the concepts of genre

and narrative. I furthered this by writing a series of poems dealing with concepts of 'first' and 'last', and focused on creating a continuous sense of the present through my use of tenses and repetition within the text. Inspired by Love's *Feeling Backward*, and the use of multiple 'source' materials in the work of Child and Bellamy, I also wanted to recontextualise these anachronistic queer pulp narratives in order to bring the past into the present. In *SHE!* I work with a tension between remembering and forgetting in order to negotiate the temporality of queer history. In Chapter One, I will discuss these techniques alongside my close readings of the function of queer time in Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups* and Child's *A Motive for Mayhem*.

Chapter Two will discuss later parts of the project, specifically my interest in place and space within my writing practice. I will discuss my use of the book as a political, queer and malleable space, and will posit that my project treats genre as an ideological space that can be queered through techniques of collage and disorientation. I will also discuss the text's (re)creation of 'place', particularly notions of the home and the city, which were developed in response to the work of Edwards and Bergvall. Finally, I wish to discuss creative representations of utopian and dystopian spaces within *SHE!*, and will posit that a degree of negativity might be a necessary political measure in order to bridge the gap between creative practice and sociopolitical action. I wish to conclude by comparing the techniques of queer experimental writing I analyze within the thesis with the far-left movement more generally. I will posit that textual acts of queering time and space are linked to contemporary social actions of protest and occupation as ways of re-



imagining social order outside of heteronormative and capitalist forms of social control.

Whilst the limitations of this thesis mean that only some sections of my creative submission will be discussed, it is my belief that both this thesis and the creative practice can be viewed as twin explorations of the same research interests; that *SHE!* is as much of an exploration of the possibilities of queer time and space as this thesis. *SHE!*, like the work of Bergvall, Bellamy, Child and Edwards, attempts, in Child's words, to 'occupy' hegemonic space queerly, and to queer temporality by bringing the 'not-previous' into the present. In doing this, the texts 'eat away at the boundaries of the art', creating an innovative, radical text through acts of queering time and space.

# CHAPTER ONE:

## 'THE NOT-PREVIOUS BECOMES PRESENT': QUEER TEMPORALITIES

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### I. CRAFTING QUEER TEMPORALITIES

In *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*, Judith Roof challenges Roland Barthes' assertion that 'narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself'.<sup>28</sup> Roof instead argues that the structure of narrative functions as both a capitalist and heterosexual hegemonic structure that at once limits social behavior and makes those limits invisible:

[n]arrative's apparent rendition of life experiences...is already an ideological version of (re)production produced by the figurative cooperation of a naturalized capitalism and heterosexuality. Narrative's dynamic enacts ideology and narrative's constant production proliferates that ideology continually and naturally, as if it were simply a fact of life and sense itself.<sup>29</sup>

I wish to begin by looking at Judith Roof's theory of the narrative's compulsory heterosexuality, and to examine how a poetic practice which 'perverts' or 'queers' traditional linear narrative form can generate types of queer time, through the disruption of the narrative time of the text. Using Judith Halberstam's conception of 'queer time' as being a subcultural creation which exposes the reliance of mainstream culture upon notions of heterosexual life events, I will demonstrate how writing which utilizes narrative in a subversive and experimental way exposes both narrative time and the retrospective

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<sup>28</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 79

<sup>29</sup> Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. xvii

construction of linearity within this time as constructions, rather than as naturally present, or 'simply there'. I will argue that through a series of writing practices that I consider to be part of a queer experimental writing practice – including collage, cut-ups, repetition and self-reflexive investigations of genre and narration – the three texts I discuss all generate forms of queer temporality. These temporalities are characterized by an anachronistic attention to the queer past, acts of forgetting (to create looping and pulsating temporalities) and an 'eternal' present which liberates the future from the past and expands the revolutionary possibilities of the moment.

Through close readings of Abigail Child's *A Motive for Mayhem* and Dodie Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups*, as well as a methodology of my own practice in *SHE!*, I wish to demonstrate the political implications of creating queer time through perverting narrative frameworks. Reading these texts alongside recent accounts of queer history, I will argue that queer time is in fact already present in history and recreated in these texts. In Abigail Child's words, the texts come to demonstrate that '[i]t is not that we are "underneath" and surfacing but that we are part of the surface being denied substance. That we are an authentic voice and our invisibility a reflection of the entrenched powers that be'.<sup>30</sup> Child writes that it is the process of 'socialization' which renders queer identities invisible or silent, and I wish to posit that the perversions of narrative which occur in Child, Bellamy and my own practice are forms of necessary anti-socialization through the disimbrication of time and narrative from linearity; a making messy of time which exposes the parts

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<sup>30</sup> Abigail Child, *This is Called Moving: A Critical Poetics of Film* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), p. 6

and selves which do not fit easily into the cause-and-effect temporality of the linear narrative. Through an alternate construction of time, history and narrative, these texts allow queers to (re)appear.

My exploration of the political implications of queering narrative begins with Roof's insights in *Come As you Are*. Roof's investigation into the sexuality of narrative is, like mine, structural rather than thematic. Roof aligns narrative with both heterosexuality and reproduction, stating that 'narrative and sexuality somehow jointly engender and reproduce a heterosexual ideology'.<sup>31</sup> She traces the ways in which narrative form can be traditionally defined by landmark heterosexual life events: marriage and reproduction.<sup>32</sup> She also borrows a Marxist critique of narrative as aligned with production, indicating that it also allies itself with reproduction. Roof states that 'narrative operates like ideology', a 'heteroideology' which presents itself as both a natural and a complete system, outside of which it is difficult to navigate. She posits that 'interwound with one another, narrative and sexuality operate within the reproductive and/or productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalized understanding of the shape and meaning of life' (p. xxvii). Narrative is thus read by Roof in a similar fashion to Judith Butler's thesis on gender: as a social construction which in turn governs social behavior, all the while presenting itself as the reverse of this and creating a longstanding self-capitulation to normative values which

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<sup>31</sup> Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xv

<sup>32</sup> Though I am aware that civil partnerships and gay adoption rights are recognized in the UK, I would argue that ideologically the life structure of marriage and reproduction that Roof outlines, and the pressure felt by individuals to follow this structure, belongs to a heteronormative hegemony. Gay marriage in particular has long been an issue within queer politics, being widely considered to be part of a gay and lesbian assimilationist agenda which seeks to move LGBTQ subjects closer to heterosexual life structures.

present themselves as naturally present. Butler writes that '[t]here is no gender identity behind expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its result'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in Roof's argument, narrative's totalizing effect is responsible for cultural attitudes towards heterosexuality, reproduction and production, the values which the shape of narrative mimics.

If this system is totalizing, how do we begin to write outside of it? Roof writes that '[n]arrative is so subtly and ubiquitously operative that I cannot even define it except through narrative'.<sup>34</sup> Whilst this could be seen as the completion of the closed system of narrative, an effect of its pervasive control upon the understanding and discussion of ideologies, it becomes for Roof (and has become for me, too) the starting point for thinking about how to escape the 'heteroideology' of narrative. Roof states that she began *Come As You Are* with a dissatisfaction with the representation of lesbians in narrative:

Why am I rarely happy with any narrative that represents or suggests the presence of lesbian sexuality? There always seems to be something slightly alienating if not definitively wrong about it [...] If culture is defined by or defines the story—if narrative is a means of cultural evaluation and oppression—must we change the story and the role the lesbian plays in it to alter the lesbian's place in culture? If lesbian sexuality is entirely a construction of the discursive fields that define it, is it possible to represent the lesbian differently and still have either a recognizable lesbian or a discernable narrative? (pp. xxvi-xxvii)

Thus, Roof sees lesbian representation within narrative as merely another version of the 'heteroideology' of narrative, with the replacement of some straight characters with lesbian ones. She states that 'what these deliberately lesbian stories reveal is how difficult it is to surmount narrative's reproductive

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 34

<sup>34</sup> Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xv

ideology as long as the writer aims only at form and content' (p. xxxv). Instead, what Roof is interested in is what she terms the 'perverse narrative', which, she states, is less about the inclusion of sexualities and genders which fail to fit inside a 'heteroideology', but more to do with an awareness of and perversion of narrative itself: '[i]nsofar as perversity belongs to narrative as the instance of its potential dissolution, the perverse narrative...would be a narrative about narrative dissolution' (p. xxiv). Thus, as part of a 'perversity' outside of heterosexual ideology, the lesbian narrative would, rather than 'locating the lesbian again within the overweening heteronarrative' (p. xxxv) in telling the lesbian story, rather enact a formal perversity upon narrative itself, whereby the system of representation is acknowledged as such – a structured system rather than a natural occurrence – and is then deconstructed. To demonstrate this, Roof analyses Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, stating that its perversity comes not through the presence of lesbian and transvestite characters, but rather its self-aware deconstruction of the reproductive narrative and metaphorical family structures within the text.

Roof uses this thesis to code a series of fairly established twentieth century narratives as perverse in their self-conscious deconstruction of narrative form. In this thesis I will be looking at a series of experimental poems and prose poems which have this question of how to pervert the heteronarrative coded into their methodologies, as an intrinsic part of what I consider to be a *queer* writing practice. Both Child's 'A Motive for Mayhem' and Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups* hold the concepts of queer sexuality and narrative construction as central thematic and structural concerns, and the

methodologies of both pieces involve a physical or metaphorical deconstruction of narratives of sexuality. My interest in this chapter is to examine – through close readings of both pieces, and a discussion of my own methodology in *SHE!* – how these techniques operate in the text.

Furthermore, by examining Judith Halberstam's conception of 'queer temporality', I wish to posit that through a queering of narrative (that is, for the purposes of this thesis, a piece of work which employs experimental techniques to disrupt and investigate narrative, and does this with particular attention to elements of sexuality and gender within narrative construction) forms of 'queer time' are produced. I will also argue that these queer temporalities are not just a metaphorical product of a perverted narrative, but also resonate with the history of queer sexuality and culture.

The negation or manipulation of narrative is obviously not exclusive to queer writing. Indeed, the authority of linear narrative and the temporal organization of writing have long been questions explored in innovative writing practices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Furthermore, as I have outlined in my introduction, both lyric poetry and avant-garde writing have been defined partly by their ability to negate and manipulate the temporal linearity of traditional narrative structures. However, I would argue that queer writers have a particular relationship to the ideology and power structure of narrative, and this relationship demands a direct address within the work. Abigail Child writes that 'the challenge of difference and experience of difference, of living as a devalued person in a defended culture,

creates/demands expressive freedoms'.<sup>35</sup> Robert Glück, in his essay 'Long Note on New Narrative', discusses the need to confront narrative head-on in writing as the spark which ignited the New Narrative movement in 1970s San Francisco (a movement which Dodie Bellamy has been a central part of). He recalls wishing to place himself within an avant-garde writing tradition, yet feeling ill-at-ease with the Language Poetry movement developing at the time, finding its 'luxurious idealism' and the outright rejection of representation problematic in relation to devalued subject positions:

whole areas of my experience, especially my gay experience, were not admitted to this utopia, partly because the mainstream reflected a resoundingly coherent image back to me – an image so unjust that it amounted to a tyranny that I could not turn my back on.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the negation of narrative and the complete surrender of the representation of 'the speaking subject' in of narrative (arguably what Watten terms simply 'nonnarration',<sup>37</sup> implying a simple move away into what Glück describes as 'the largest freedom, that of language itself')<sup>38</sup> fails in some ways to acknowledge the complex relationship to power, to 'expressive freedoms' (p. 26), that marginalized peoples have; those devalued or silenced by dominant power structures might first need to address these structures and voice their subjectivity, rather than to negate it altogether. This is a crucial breaking point between queer experimental texts and experimental writing more generally: that what Glück calls the 'poetry of disjunction' (p. 26) might,

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<sup>35</sup> Child, *This is Called Moving*, p. 5

<sup>36</sup> Robert Glück, 'Long Note on New Narrative', *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Mary Burger (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2005), pp. 26-45 (p. 26)

<sup>37</sup> Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), p. 198

<sup>38</sup> Glück, 'Long Note on New Narrative', p. 26



in its rejection of representation, assume an existing cultural representation not granted to some groups of 'devalued' people. By addressing this lack head-on, and overturning it not by representing the self with the same tools (linearity of narrative, stability of subject) which oppress, but, rather, by demanding 'expressive freedoms' in order to explore areas of identity shut out by hegemonic culture and language practices, a queer experimental writing practice can emerge.

Roof demonstrates that narrative is a powerful and controlling force which both replicates and produces heterosexual ideology. Any writing attempting to voice that which narrative excludes, such as non-heterosexual writing structures, needs to first explore and subvert this system in which it is silenced before it can move to a more 'pure' form of avant-garde poetics. As Glück states, '[w]e (eventually we were gay, lesbian and working-class writers) could not let narration go' (p. 27). As such, queer experimental writing has its own particular subset of issues, questions and techniques relating to the treatment of narrative. These arise from a specific, queer relationship to power and authority, and result in a specific type of writing practice which attempts in various ways to explode the system of narrative from within.

Like Roof's heteroideological labelling of narrative, Halberstam posits that cultural understandings of time are structured around 'those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death'.<sup>39</sup> She argues that queer subcultures defy these markers, effecting alternative temporalities which exist 'in opposition to the institutions of family,

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<sup>39</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 2

heterosexuality, and reproduction' (p. 1). Halberstam cites the AIDS epidemic as being a factor in the alternative relationship queer subculture has to temporality. She states that its effect is the sense of a 'constantly diminishing future' which 'creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead [...]the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand' (p. 2). From political and historical moments such as this, queer subculture creates 'new temporal logics' (p. 2) characterized by an emphasis on the present, an extended or 'stretched out adolescence' (p. 153), a sense of speed, and a reclamation of history. Halberstam argues that these 'new temporal logics' hold relevance not just for queer subcultures but to also for our understanding of the ways in which we perceive time and space more generally. Analyzing the way in which we understand and value time, where we place emphasis, and how we use time also gives rise to a consideration of how we live, and whose lives do or don't conform to a temporal life structure that relies on the future promise of wealth and children. Halberstam argues, for example, that events such as the AIDS epidemic demonstrate that Western culture considers some bodies – namely in this case non-heterosexual, non-white and non-Western bodies – more 'expendable' than others, and that this might indicate a union of bourgeois heterosexual and capitalist logic, a relation of reproduction and production (p. 3-4). As such, 'queer time and space are useful frameworks of assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' (p. 4).

It follows, then, from Roof and Halberstam's arguments, that a

heteronarrative would both reflect and produce a specifically heterosexual time. As such, I would argue that Ricoeur's thesis – that narrative makes time 'human'<sup>40</sup> – might not account for forms of 'human' whose lived temporality is (dis)organized differently. If, as Roof argues, 'the sexuality of narrative is straight',<sup>41</sup> and the ubiquitous nature of narrative makes it difficult to escape from without being either silenced or swept back into its ideology, then the 'human' recognition of time through narrative would be a fundamentally exclusive and heterosexual 'human' experience. Furthermore, if, as both theorists argue, both narrative and time are perceived and organized around heterosexual life events, the representation of either furthers an ideology of enforced heterosexuality. By writing a 'perverse' narrative which functions as a narrative *of* narrative, both the 'heteroideology' and the 'natural' status of that ideology are challenged. By breaking this cycle, the perverse or queer narrative also reconfigures its relationship to time, and can produce temporalities which both reflect queer temporal experience and allow the queer subject 'expressive freedoms' from a narrative temporality within which queers are devalued. Such a production also reveals, in a wider context, the ways in which narrative creates an ideology which presents itself as naturally there, the structure of which cuts off and silences those bodies, voices or situations which do not match its logic. Whilst Watten argues that literary temporality does not depend on narrative structure due to the displacement of narrative in avant-garde and postmodernist work, I would argue that a different kind of time is produced by these texts queer texts, and that this time

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<sup>40</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, p. 3

<sup>41</sup> Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xxvi

is a queer time. Through queering narrative and temporality, these texts also critique heteronormative narrative temporality and the ideology it perpetuates.

As well as being repressed through heteroideology, queer sexuality has a more literal relationship with being *out* of time, narrative and history. Queers have been largely ignored, silenced and 'in the closet' through most of history, this absence punctuated by moments of positive and negative visibility. These moments of visibility are dependent upon the climate of the culture in which they appear, and times of liberation allow for a retrospective 'reading' of these visible moments. Artificial links are thus formed to make a form of patchwork history, as Susan Hayes traces in her etymological summary of the birth of the queer movement:

First there was Sappho (the good old days). Then there was the acceptable homoeroticism of classical Greece, the excesses of Rome. Then, casually to skip two millennia, there was Oscar Wilde, sodomy, blackmail and imprisonment, Forster, Sackville-West, Radclyffe Hall, inversion, censorship; then pansies, butch and femme, poofs, queens, fag hags, more censorship and blackmail, and Orton. Then there was Stonewall (1969) and we all became gay. There was feminism, too, and some of us became lesbian feminists and even lesbian separatists. There was drag and clones and dykes and politics and Gay Sweatshop. Then there was Aids, which, through the intense discussion of sexual practices (as opposed to sexual identities), spawned the Queer movement in America. Then that supreme manifestation of Thatcherite paranoia, Clause 28, which provoked the shotgun marriage of lesbian and gay politics in the UK. The child is Queer, and a problem child it surely is.<sup>42</sup>

The 2000-year gap in queer visibility yokes together ancient Greece and Rome with 19<sup>th</sup> Century England. Equally, negative and positive catalysts for queer visibility are conflated: cultural production, such as the writing of Sappho, Sackville-West or Orton, becomes as important to queer history as

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<sup>42</sup> Susan Hayes, 'Coming Over all Queer', *The New Statesman and Society*, 16<sup>th</sup> September 1994, pp. 14-15

legislative acts such as the Labouchère Amendment or Section 28, both of which discriminate against same-sex relationships and make aspects of homosexuality illegal. Whilst it can be argued that the history of any civilization demonstrates that social change is achieved through struggle, it does seem that in queer history in particular there is a conflation of negative and positive causes and effects. As a result, changes in religious, scientific, political and psychological treatments of sexuality (what Michel Foucault discusses as the 'periodisation' of the deployment of sexuality)<sup>43</sup> are the things which has made it visible. Queer history is typified by hegemonic oppression at least as much as moments of liberation and artistic expression, and as such it follows that, between this and the threat of 'no future' that Halberstam outlines,<sup>44</sup> 'queer time' is characterized by a focus on the present and the possibilities of the moment. Reflexively, I will argue, work that produces 'queer time' also resonates more accurately with queer history. Whilst Ricoeur argues that narrative and time inform each other and are shaped by each other, I would like to argue that the queering or perversion of narrative in experimental writing produces a kind of time that is more congruous with queer history.

Another feature of queer time I wish to discuss is the re-imagining of history from a queer perspective through texts that pay homage to the 'queer archive' of history. I will be discussing how all three texts engage with a history of negativity, suffering and violence in order to re-imagine a queer

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<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Periodisation', in *The History of Sexuality 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 115 - 131

<sup>44</sup> Halberstam's usage of the term 'no future' is indebted to Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

future. I will be drawing upon Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards*, particularly its central thesis that '[s]ame-sex desire is marked by a long history of association with failure, impossibility, and loss',<sup>45</sup> and attention to this history can uncover present injustices in order that we might imagine a future without them. Through breaking the closed circuit of linear narrative, and the use of source materials from the queer archive, these texts address the 'what else' of history by finding different ways to 'tell' it.

In my account of the relationship between non-linear temporalities and queerness in experimental writing practices, I will also be drawing upon Judith Halberstam's recent book *The Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam posits that acts of unbecoming and forgetting can be politically powerful for queers, and that forgetting might be part of a queer temporality rooted in the present: 'forgetting allows a release from the weight of the past and the menace of the future'.<sup>46</sup> I will be drawing parallels between the politically potent act of forgetting and the presence of looping and pulsating time, achieved through techniques of collage and repetition, that are present in the three texts I discuss. Just as an attention to history creates forms of 'patchwork' time which brings the queer archive of the past into the present, I will argue that forgetfulness and unknowing within texts allows for the freedom to reimagine a queer future free from the blueprint of the past.

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<sup>45</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 21

<sup>46</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 83

## II. PERVERTING: QUEERING TEMPORALITY IN ABIGAIL CHILD'S 'A MOTIVE FOR MAYHEM'

Misappropriate this moment. Demand its emergence, blunder, unbounded.  
—Abigail Child, 'A Motive for Mayhem'

Abigail Child's 1987 film *Mayhem*<sup>47</sup> is the 6<sup>th</sup> part of her film series *Is This What You Were Born For?*. Commenting on the project, Child writes that she wanted to 'uncover the historical models through which we exist as a body; to collect, destroy and reconstruct the vocabulary of the body'.<sup>48</sup> *Mayhem* uses a combination of archive footage and original scenes shot by Child in order to explore these themes. The work also borrows iconography, lighting techniques and tropes of the film noir genre, and collages them in such a way that their narrative is both investigated and disrupted. Recognizable characters of the film noir genre are present throughout: the heroine, the spy or detective, and the *femme fatale* all appear as 'characters' within the film. Found or appropriated footage from different eras is spliced together with Child's own film, and as such the 'characters' change from scene to scene. Low-key lighting and editing techniques give a pronounced noir aesthetic to the piece, and both the soundtrack and editing recreate the action, suspense, erotic subtext and moral ambiguity of the genre. However, the element of a plot or linear sequence *per se* is removed as the film moves through time periods, from person to person as implied 'character', and from situation to situation, all removed from their original context. As such, any

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<sup>47</sup> Abigail Child, *Mayhem* (1987) < [http://www.ubu.com/film/child\\_mayhem.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/child_mayhem.html) > [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> December 2011]

<sup>48</sup> Child, *This Is Called Moving*, p. 11

narrative constructed by the viewer is relational and arbitrary, informed by the connections and disconnections of these recontextualized fragments of 'original' narratives combined with the expectation of narrative that Child's use of the film noir aesthetic implies: the film relies on familiarity with genre and the viewer's expectation of a recognizable linearity of narrative in order to disrupt and pervert it.

Child's choice of archive material often deals directly with the politics of gender and sexual identity. Amongst the collaged footage there is vintage Japanese erotica featuring two women having sex and being interrupted by a masked burglar, as well as what appears to be a woman directing two men to kiss, and footage of a semi-naked man being restrained with ropes. This foregrounding of same-sex desire – sometimes purely through its inclusion and sometimes implied through Child's editorial choices – is in itself a political act. It performs an archeology of forgotten queer moments in cinematic history which change the implications of the material placed around them. It queers the rest of the film through association, undermining the heterosexual undercurrent of eroticism present in film noir. By placing footage from the 1920s alongside scenes filmed by Child in 1986, Child creates a proximity and interplay between decades and cultures. Through repetition and collaging techniques, time also moves backwards and forwards within the film, with events spliced and repeated in reverse. Consequently, meanings gleaned from the film are necessarily relational and subjective, which displaces the film from the 'cause and effect' logic of linear narrative. This logic can be aligned with Roof's concept of the 'straight' or heterosexual narrative, which relies on



a 'reproductive engine'<sup>49</sup> of meaning, 'a chronological narrative which proceeds from risky multiplicity to productive singularity' (p. xx). Thus Child's film can be seen as a 'perverse' or queer narrative in that it remains with multiplicity and risk, using these to question the authority of both narrative and heterosexuality.

Child's use of archive footage and collage in *Mayhem* can also be read as a form of queer anachronistic practice that Love refers to as 'feeling backward'. Love's text looks back to a pre-liberation archive of literature 'visibly marked by queer suffering'.<sup>50</sup> The 'backward' of 'feeling backward' refers both to the anachronistic approach of 'feeling' into the past, and to the negative feelings of 'nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, *ressentiment*, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness' (p. 4) the texts deal with. Child's use of vintage Japanese lesbian erotica is an object from a lost queer archive, carrying with it similarly problematic 'backward' feelings. The footage included shows two women performing cunnilingus upon one another and interrupted by a masked burglar, whom they chase and coerce into joining in the sex act. On one level this can be viewed as a powerful and lost object from the queer archive, and Child can be seen to be paying homage to this dangerous portrayal of dominant and queer female sexuality. By bringing it into the 'light' (quite literally, through the filmmaking process) Child also brings it into the present, and by implication juxtaposes it with contemporary representations of female

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<sup>49</sup> Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xxii

<sup>50</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 4

sexuality. In contrast with the internet-age saturation of visual culture with erotic and pornographic images of women as hairless, surgically altered and passive, this archive footage can be read as a lesbian-feminist portrayal of the female libido. On the other hand, the invasion of the queer space by the male ‘burglar’ can be read as a metaphor for the exploitation of the figure of the lesbian for male desire and the re-reading of the lesbian sex act as aligned with masculine pleasure, the heterosexual male acting as a filter between viewer and ‘action’ in order to straighten the gaze of the audience. As such, what Laura Mulvey describes as the ‘male erotic privilege’<sup>51</sup> remains intact to some extent. The film simultaneously exposes the hidden lesbians of the past and raises issues about the ongoing representation of women and lesbians in visual culture.

There is a ‘backwardness’ about this footage through both its age and the complex feelings it evokes: whilst the footage can be read as erotic and playful, the juxtaposition of the footage with the menacing soundtrack Child has created, as well as the arguably sinister figure of the burglar, add tension to a viewer’s experience, and problematize any erotic or voyeuristic pleasure a viewer might gain from it. The simultaneity of pleasure and fear can evoke the ‘backward’ feelings of shame and regret, whilst the joy of ‘discovery’ might lead to a kind of ‘false’ nostalgia for a queer past that did not exist, because it was hidden or censored. Love believes that ‘[b]ackward feelings serve as an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer

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<sup>51</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 123

narratives of progress'.<sup>52</sup> By revisiting objects from the queer past, we can also get a measure of the present. Not only does Child's use of queer archive footage pay homage to a lost queer past, it provokes feelings of shame and forbidden desire that question what we still lose in public visual representations of female and queer sexuality. Furthermore, these ominous feelings provoked through the collage of sound and image in Child's work mirror a political reaction to her work: upon release, the film was censored in Tokyo due to its use of the archive footage.<sup>53</sup> So, by looking backwards into the forgotten queer past, and placing this forgotten object within the present, Child problematizes the idea of 'narratives of progress'. She questions the backwardness of the present as well as paying homage to the past by placing it within the present, creating a complex temporality which defies a 'narrative of progress' through the obfuscation of linearity and the complicated interrelation of past and present.

Whilst *Mayhem* draws attention to the fabricated linearity of film narrative through its formal construction, creating a distancing effect for the viewer by disrupting expectations of cinematic linearity and genre, Child's text 'A Motive for Mayhem' adds another layer of distance between the viewer/reader and the 'action' or material of the film/text. As in Roof's analysis of *Nightwood*, the queer politics of the work come not exclusively through the spectacle of same-sex desire, but also the way in which the narrative itself is undermined through juxtaposition and collaging, so that a multiplicity of politically potent

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<sup>52</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 27

<sup>53</sup> Abigail Child, 'MAYHEM: Abigail Child' <<http://abigailchild.com/index.php?films/mayhem/>> [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011]

meanings can be gleaned from the images. 'A Motive For Mayhem' furthers this self-reflexive narrative technique by commenting upon the viewing experience, creating a metanarrative which further deconstructs and analyses the process by which narrative controls and makes meanings. '[P]osture is semantic'<sup>54</sup> within the text through Child's reflexive parody of narration. From the beginning of the text the narrator/speaker of the text is aligned with the reader/viewer, 'seeing' things from the same perspective and being privy to the same amount of knowledge. We are told that '[s]he's looking out of the picture. The bars across her face hold her in the picture and hold her from us...There's another person in this room. We can't see them' (p. 9). Rather than being an omniscient presence, as in the narrator who reveals what s/he chooses, or, similarly, the film director who can see the 'whole' but chooses what to focus on through the lens of the camera, the world presented in the text is experienced from the same perspective by all of 'us'. This creates a profound distance between the reader and the text. Through the refusal of omniscient narration in the text and the alignment of the narrator with the reader, a definite 'here' and 'there' (or, 'her' and 'us') of reader and text occurs, where 'here' is the act of reading or looking, and 'there' is the time and place of the action, implicated as happening in the past and always partially unavailable, yet being newly revealed to us in the present tense.

The way in which the text is narrated – the impuissance of the narrator and her alignment with the reader and viewer rather than the 'action' – can be seen as a critique of the potentially exploitative power of narrative, particularly

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<sup>54</sup> Abigail Child, *A Motive for Mayhem* (Elmwood: Potes & Poets Press, 1989), p. 9

in relation to 'presenting' gender and sexuality in the form of a spectacle. The mode in which the 'action' within 'A Motive for Mayhem' is described, its partiality, lacuna, and nonlinear sequencing, draws a reader's attention to the order and mode in which the world presented. As we are moved through an 'onslaught' of images, it becomes apparent that a certain point of view is being privileged, external to the control of both narrator and reader. The text documents the viewing experience, noting the way in which attention is (mis)directed. Events and people become placed in a hierarchy through this (mis)direction. Child writes of one still that '[t]here's a pause in her lifted left shoulder. She's about to say something and he's listening, but his attention is in the other direction. There's another person in this room. We can't see them' (p. 9). We are told of what we are missing – what 'she' is about to say and the identity of the 'other' person in the room – at the same time as we are *actually* missing it. Like the 'he' of the text, our attention is being directed elsewhere. By filtering our perception through a constructed 'viewer' and being made so aware of this fact, we are being distanced from the text in order that Child can lay bare the mechanics of narration and point to that which is excluded from it.

The alignment of narrator/speaker with reader/viewer in 'A Motive for Mayhem' places the camera as the ultimate 'narrator', in that it is the camera's focus which defines the parameters of what, when, and how we see. Child's use of this technique in 'A Motive for Mayhem' draws a reader's attention to what controls the way we see things, the way we tell stories and the way we interact. By demonstrating the construction of narrative, Child highlights who is the focus and who is ignored or silenced in an ideology which, whilst

pertaining to be natural, privileges certain types of exchanges, interactions and people over others. This act disempowers the heteroideology of narrative by drawing attention to the artifice and intentionality of its construction. Roof argues that the pervasive power of narrative relies upon its status as 'natural': '[n]arrative's dynamic enacts ideology and narrative's constant production proliferates that ideology continually and naturally, as if it were simply a fact of life and sense itself'.<sup>55</sup> As well as creating a 'perverse' narrative by disassembling it, Child also points to the positive possibilities for writing outside of heterosexual narrative order. By illustrating what *isn't* present and telling us what we're missing, Child places the linear heterosexual and reproductive narrative of 'productive singularity' a part of a larger system, rather than as the system itself.

Just as Child's use of Japanese erotica in *Mayhem* at once brings the hidden past to light and rereads the insufficiencies of the present, Child's attention to what we miss as viewers and readers gives an ominous sense of what (or who) accounts of history and linear narratives exclude. In *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, Valerie Traub explores the lesbian desire to delve into the archives of forgotten queer history, and suggests we do so in part so that we might find ourselves there, recovering from the trauma of invisibility and loss queer identity is bound up with: '[d]espite the common invocation of how homosexuals have been "hidden from history", there has been little investigation into the effects on the

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<sup>55</sup> Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xvii

collective *lesbian* psyche of the systematic denial of historicity'.<sup>56</sup> Traub explores the psychological effects of what she terms the 'empty archive' of queer history upon queer subjects. We might read Child's allusions to what is missing, through the way in which she draws our attention to the way 'action' is framed and limited by narration and the camera lens, as a way of addressing this sense of loss and emptiness we face when confronting queer history.

As well as drawing attention to the construction of narrative and the selective memory of history through these distancing devices, Child emphasizes the limitations of genre through the presentation of film noir themes and aesthetics. I want to examine the way in which Child uses tropes such as light and dark, the *femme fatale*, stock characters and sexual desire (between viewer as subject and woman as object, as well as an internal erotic subtext within the genre) in order to investigate the sexual politics of these devices. I also want to argue that through doing this, Child investigates the possibilities for imagining other types of sexuality and gender relations which do not replicate these power structure of the heteroideological narrative.

The repetition of phrases such as 'here is another' or 'now it's later' within the text, as well as the repetition of 'she' and 'he', suggest interchangeable stock characters and situations which highlight the limitations of genre. Recalling an earlier 'scene', these actions and characters accumulate to create these stock characters within a reader's mind, whereby all the action taking place could be between the same two people at different

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<sup>56</sup> Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 450

points. The repetitive language also highlights the limitations of genre, in that by constricting the content of the art to a certain formula of actions, characters and situations, the vocabulary also narrows. By using difference to illustrate sameness, Child emphasizes genre's limit. The archetypal nature of the people represented renders them interchangeable in a reader's mind, creating a sense of the eternal and universal. This cycle of sameness is then broken and disrupted by the sheer number of images, scenes and situations presented by Child. The sequence of the film noir narrative is replaced by parataxis, and a reader is held in a tension between recognition and unfamiliarity, causing each shift in meaning or reference to 'rewrite' any germ of linearity planted in a reader's mind. This creates a form of continuous present, as a reader is blocked from making connections between the 'present moment' of reading and what has come before (and, consequently, cannot project the present into the future through a familiarity with the genre's narrative). This results in what Halberstam terms 'an urgency of being', which 'expands the potential of the moment'.<sup>57</sup> These temporal effects, juxtaposed with the 'eternal' time of the noir characters and tropes Child presents (and which a reader can recognize even out of context) create a queer temporality full of multiplicities and possibility, and at the same time rendered temporary and mutable. This temporality, combined with the limitations of identity Child highlights in the noir genre, both illustrates narrative's shortcomings and unlocks potential alternatives.

Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* builds on the theories of queer

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<sup>57</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 2



time and space developed in *A Queer Time and Place*. Halberstam investigates acts of forgetting and unbecoming as both acts of 'queer failure' and as acts which generate types of queer temporality. Analysing the function of forgetting in narratives of contemporary mainstream cinema, Halberstam proposes that '[f]or women and queer people, forgetfulness can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary'.<sup>58</sup> She notes that the incorporation of amnesia and forgetfulness into the narrative structure of mainstream films such as *Dude, Where's My Car* queers the structural temporality of the films: '[the] act or nonact of forgetting on which the loopy narrative depends arrests the developmental and progress narratives of heteronormativity' (p. 59). One can see Child's experimental use of the noir genre in *Mayhem*, and her textual translation of this practice in 'A Motive for Mayhem', as setting up a kind of amnesia or deliberate forgetfulness (if there can be such a thing) effected through the divorce of cause from effect and the subsequent disruption of linearity. We, as viewers and readers, also 'forget' who is who as we move through the eternal present of the 'action'. What Child relies on is our familiarity with the tropes of genre and with the predictable linearity of narratives. In our struggle (and, ultimately, our failure) to turn supplemental and paratactic text and image into linear and accumulative ones which be (re)productive, we can reflect upon the limiting effects of linearity and genre upon the possibilities of the moment at hand.

Another repeated trope from the film noir genre within Child's film and text is the use of light and dark. *Mayhem* is a very high contrast black and

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<sup>58</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 83

white film, with menacing shadows and overexposure creating extremes of light and dark. Whilst this has the effect of creating a film noir aesthetic, it also draws a viewer's attention to the materiality of film as a light process, again distancing us from the 'action' of the film through this implication of materiality. The text translates this use of light and dark into language, with imagery of both throughout. Light and dark within the text function as symbolic binaries that imitate and serve as a metaphor for male and female sexuality and gender identities. They also, by implication, stand in for the obligatory heterosexuality and reproduction which these binaries (and, as Roof argues, the ideology of narrative) sustain, and which queer sexuality is external to. Through this, Child questions the ethics of the film noir genre, in particular the ethics of gender and sexuality as represented through light and dark. Much of the imagery related to sexuality within the text self-consciously mimics what is implied in film noir through the character of the *femme fatale*. In this system, sexualized women represent darkness, and the 'light' (readable here as representation and/or visibility) renders them 'dangerous' to the implied male, heterosexual hero as well as to the film's audience and the text's readership. One still towards the beginning of the film is translated into the text thus:

Here is another. She is on her knees between chair and umbrella. The field is interior. The body is waiting. She looks up, seductive and luscious. She's arrogant. Her breast is big. It's a perfect volcano. In an encased waist, glitter to point with just a hint of fat pout.<sup>59</sup>

The visibility of the sexualized female body is implied as dangerous – the woman's breast is 'big' and this is read as 'a perfect volcano' – seductive yet threatening, 'natural' but not nurturing, a large-scale disaster waiting to

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<sup>59</sup> Child, *A Motive for Mayhem*, p. 9

happen. She is thus both 'arrogant' and temperamental, unpredictable, and her visibility is dangerous. In another still, that of a 'dead body', 'the women are screaming | the light makes them desperate' (p. 10). Again, this seems to be an issue of women and visibility; the 'natural' connection between women and darkness prevails, and a kind of hysteria ensues in the 'light' of visibility and representation, rendering the women 'screaming' and 'desperate'.

Repetitions within the text also function in a cyclical way, particularly in relation to sexuality. Cycles of desire created within the text can be seen to represent the ways in which heterosexual erotica works. We are told that, in one situation, a man is standing 'twirling something. Behind him are two maids. That's the second thing you notice' (p. 9). These maids are described as stock characters who are aware that they are performing:

The maid on the left is relaxed. She won't go "on" until later. The second bends forward to see what is happening. The two women are the background to his repeated circling. In the background, they are the repeating figure (p. 9).

From this description, the image is of two actors dressed as maids, 'relaxed' because aren't 'on' (the implied stage or film set). However, this is complicated by the reference to them *as* maids, and seems to suggest a performance of identity more generally. That these maids are the 'repeating figure' implies that they are eternally present within the action and that they may be any other of the females within the piece. As with the other repetitions in the text, this functions to highlight the limitations of narrative, and creates an amnesiac continuous present which problematizes the linearity of cinematic narratives.

The metaphorical gaze within the text is controlled, in that we are told

what we see and in which order. Furthermore, Child makes explicit the desired effect of this ordering through including the anticipated focus and reaction to each 'scene'. Though it is arguably always the case that the writer and filmmaker direct both our attention and our emotions through deliberate linguistic and aesthetic choices, Child's explicit references to limit and exclusion make us self-conscious in our role as reader and metaphorical viewer. Her control of our attention through these distancing devices simulates what Mulvey describes as the 'psychodynamics of voyeurism'<sup>60</sup> in film, whereby our attention is held through the suspension of desire and the promise of a future, phantom climax. A pertinent example of these psychodynamics is the following:

Here is an other. She is reflection. She is texture and seduction and she's lying under the light. She's the point of focus. And yes, she's unclothed. She's holding a drink and the bit of cloth draped across her loin looks like a waterfall. Her breasts hang down. There's all this darkness. She is so actually distant. She just moved in with my action. But really, she is so distant. She's more like the door. She's double-handled. It's a double-handled door. It's a door which leads you on. There's a light under this door, luring you in, up to the window: her stage. This is the stage of the still life. We try to move away our eyes, but the folds, all the imperfections, the shadows force, focus us back onto the figure. You attend. She waits. You look. She eludes you. You wait.<sup>61</sup>

The passage works to at once hold our 'gaze', distance us and make us conscious of being placed in the position of a voyeur by the narrative, thereby enacting a perverse self-consciousness of narrative itself. We are told that 'she is reflection. She is texture and seduction and she's lying under the light'. This implies the constructed nature of the woman in question through the

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<sup>60</sup> Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 128

<sup>61</sup> Child, 'A Motive for Mayem', p. 11

materiality of film, the reflection of light and the 'texture' of the woman's body constructing an image. It also tells us the way in which to view her: she is 'an other', connected to the 'another's and 'she's of the text but with a subtle space of difference between the 'n' and the 'o' that shifts the meaning from sameness to difference. She is other to us, strange and distanced from 'us', she is foreign and unknown. We are told that 'she is the point of focus' (directing our metaphorical gaze) and that 'yes, she's unclothed' (the reason for the gaze). Through Child's mode of narration we are at once being pushed close to and being kept distant from the woman. We're being told to look, but are so aware of ourselves being placed in the position of the voyeur that we are always at mind's length from the subject through our self-consciousness as readers and, by implication, viewers. The duality of simultaneous intimacy and distancing is furthered as the woman is 'inviting you in' but at the same time 'so *actually* distant. She just moved in with my action'. This is a false intimacy, brought about by the action of the narrator. Through this technique, Child draws our attention away from feelings of desire (phantom, future-orientated desire) and towards an awareness of our reactions in the present moment, breaking with cinematic and narrative traditions through drawing our attention to them.

The concept of cyclical desire is furthered by the image of the woman as a door. The light upon the woman is the light under a closed door which 'lures you in' but is always at arm's length, moving you endlessly onward in pursuit of the sexual object – 'you attend. She waits. You look. She eludes you. You wait.' Child's positioning of the reader as voyeur draws attention to the social

function of the gaze. The female body, under the gaze, becomes a kind of performative construction, created by the medium which represents her (film, genre, narration). The body becomes surface, texture and light – an ephemeral object of desire. Desire, as represented here, is a waiting game. The reader, implicated as unwitting and self-conscious pseudo-voyeur, exists in a kind of cyclical time, always desiring, waiting, moving towards an object in the distance. Child denies the completion of this cinematic technique by refusing to let a reader/viewer project this desire into an anticipated climax of the future. The paratactic structure of the text denies the stability of both past and future in relation to the present moment, and both the desired body and the desire itself crumble under the self-reflexive critique of desire's narrative structuring. The result is similar to Child's recontextualisation of erotic material in *Mayhem*: a complexity of affect which renders the reader on the one hand desiring and voyeuristic (as that's what the text tells us we are), and on the other hand aware of the constructed nature of our positioning. What we are told we desire, we are also told is an illusion, a performance, a trick of the light. By cornering a reader in this way, and laying bare the mechanics of heterosexual voyeurism, Child at once highlights the potentially exploitative power and gender relations set up by narrative cinema, and encourages us to wriggle out of the bind in which we've been placed.

As the text continues, questions of identity arise through these themes Child has appropriated from film noir: who is and isn't looked at? Who is and isn't looking? How does the way in which our gaze is directed affect our view of what we are looking at? What are the ethics of looking? What are the ethics

of telling a story? How does the materiality of *how* a thing appears affect the politics of representation? The female body is presented as oscillating between hysterical/abjected/invisible and sexualized/objectified/visible. There is no positive representation of female sexuality within the text (the Japanese erotica I discuss as an instance of the surfacing of queer history in *Mayhem* does not seem to be traced within the text), and to engage with the female form one must take up the position of voyeur the text encourages. The way in which the female body is represented does not reflect female identity, but rather a kind of projected image of femininity upon a 'stage' or screen of performance. Much as in *Mayhem* the inclusion of found material from queer history works to highlight the inadequacy of queer representations in the 'present' of the film, the ephemeral and performative nature of woman, appearing as a kind of hologram, allows a rethinking of contemporary gender identities by placing the reader in an uncomfortable position that evokes 'backward' feelings of perversion and shame.

By revealing the way that genre and narrative can manipulate our own position as readers/viewers, Child raises the question of how to produce other kinds of art that might construct the world differently. Where is female sexuality located, between darkness, passivity and invisibility, and light, exposure and exploitation? And, perhaps a doubly difficult dilemma, how to represent female desire for the female body – something at once invisible and exploited? Child writes about the invisibility of same-sex desire in culture in *This is Called Moving*, noting that 'the smiling faces of ads are a form of control *through* resemblance. A community of perverts resembles *nobody*,

and *nobody* wants to resemble us'.<sup>62</sup> This mutual rejection gives rise to a necessary revolution in modes of representation, and this idea is transferable to the way in which narrative is appropriated, mimicked and re-ordered within Child's work. Child makes what is invisible visible through making its lack apparent, and through demonstrating the power of seamless and authoritative narrative by making us as readers uncomfortably aware of our position as voyeurs. This move, concretized by the image of the elusive woman, who at once embodies and is behind the closed door luring us in, is followed by what can be read as a poetic manifesto:

*I BEGIN MY PICTURES UNDER THE EFFECT OF SHOCK. IN A PICTURE, IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO DISCOVER NEW THINGS EVERY TIME YOU SEE IT. FOR ME A PICTURE SHOULD BE LIKE SPARKS. A MODELLED FORM IS LESS STRIKING THAN ONE WHICH IS NOT. MODELING PREVENTS SHOCK AND LIMITS MOVEMENT TO THE VISUAL DEPTH. WITHOUT MODELLING, DEPTH IS LIMITLESS. MOVEMENT CAN STRETCH TO INFINITY.*<sup>63</sup>

Child thus uses stills from her film, made predominantly from found materials and archive footage, as starting points for ideas which spiral outwards. The themes of film noir which arise can be seen as the imitation of and reflection upon concepts of 'modeling' (where modeling is read as acting, genre, setting the scene, the pretence of totality and realism which the linear narrative can convey). Child breaks this model through poetic techniques, and the split between 'surface' and 'depth' within the text can be read as the move from the occupation/imitation of existing forms (on the 'surface', the 'model') and the creation of a queer text through the modification of and critical reflection upon this form ('movement', limitless depth, infinity.)

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<sup>62</sup> Child, *This is Called Moving*, p. 38

<sup>63</sup> Child, *A Motive for Mayhem*, p. 11



There's a complex dual temporality at work here: in the 'stills' that Child is working from, time is framed, 'movement is limited', and we become aware of the construction of time in film through the linear arrangement of these still moments. However, breaking this form through repetition and a decontextualisation, Child implies that the consequence of moving away from 'modelling' is a kind of limitless and 'infinite' time. Additionally, I would argue, this 'infinite' time is, in the context of Child's work, an infinite present, much like Halberstam's definition of queer time. Child uses the present as a moment of opportunity and visibility, and the text, like the film, can be read as a series of moments. These moments work as temporary reworkings of the 'eternal' time of the heteronarrative, intervening not to offer an alternative narrative but to subversively question the natural status of narrative ideology. In the latter part of the text, this present also becomes a horizon, an 'eternity' whereby queer time occupies centre stage and can imagine other possibilities for the expression of sexuality than the limited, binary and sometimes exploitative narratives Child has appropriated in the text. Child disturbs the 'model' through repeating, interrogation, disordering and forgetting it, breaking open the moment and stretching it out to an infinite horizon of the possible.

Equally important here is the idea of 'depth', implying a move from a two-dimensional surface to a three-dimensional space, and also implying a downward move, a kind of underground or subcultural time. In *This is Called Moving*, Child writes about the connection between queer sexuality as 'repressed' and the spatiality of the movement to expression of these groups:

if I think of the radical tradition in life and art as "the return of the repressed", I need to recognize as well that it is the existence of the

repressed that demands our radicalism. It is not that we are “underneath” and surfacing but that we are part of the surface being denied substance. That we are an authentic voice and our invisibility a reflection of the entrenched powers that be. Or, at worst, a reflection of what we ourselves deny.<sup>64</sup>

Child, in this essay and in her practice, seems to be outlining two alternate (and perhaps mutually exclusive) political moves in the “radical tradition”: the ‘surfacing’ of the radical, homogenizing and assimilating it as *part of* the surface, or the move from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional space where the surface is forced downwards and outwards to give space to that which is otherwise ‘denied substance’. Child’s text does this by perverting narrative tradition from within; exposing its mechanisms and using its dissolution to provide a multiplicity of simultaneous alternatives, so that narrative becomes a starting point for exploring and expressing what it excludes.

This move from surface to depth is tangible within the text. The work shifts from a series of descriptions, which move around an axis of repetition in order to break themselves open, to a multilayered and polyvocal palimpsest in which the voices and modes of writing play off each other to expand each idea outwards in every direction into a potentially ‘infinite’ space and time. This can be seen as visual layers down (or up) the page – the text in regular font is a reflection upon the process of creating a piece of work and the ‘spectator’ or reader reaction to it. The text in italics is a poetic investigation of the metaphors and associations made through creating work in this way. The text in capitals can be read as a political manifesto on artistic and personal

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<sup>64</sup> Child, *This is Called Moving*, p. 6

commitment to a 'radical tradition'. Different sets of 'times' are at work in each part of the text, as well as different models of thinking about narrative, time and the artwork.

This part of the text begins with a reflection upon how the previous parts of the text were written, and the ethical implications of the way in which experimental practice evolves:

You pick up the original. This is the hubris of definition. You fall. This manoeuvre introduces clarity. You foreground the exception and the threshold, deflect the mean, redefine the motive, reread the need for causality.<sup>65</sup>

The 'original', the model of the film noir genre, is reworked through a 'fall': an accident, a failure. The power of falling, of failing, of forgetting, allows for an expansion of meanings through the erasure of causality and the ensuing erosion of linear narrative. When cause and effect are altered or divorced, as occurs through Child's practice of using found material and editing techniques to create work, the movement of time and our perceptions of the past are also altered. When 'causality is erased', Child writes, 'what would be left would be the resonant voluptuous suggestions of history and the human face' (p. 11). The emphasis in producing work, then, lies for Child not in the creation of 'classical unity, a formed whole, a balanced vision or harmonious work', but on the 'landscape' of 'negative capability' which investigates 'the value of the half-formed, the incomplete' (p. 12). John Keats, in the letter that is considered to be the inception of the term, describes 'negative capability' as 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without

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<sup>65</sup> Child, *A Motive for Mayhem*, p. 11

any irritable reaching after fact and reason'.<sup>66</sup> Child's departure from logical sequencing and from the 'reason' of the linear narrative can indeed be read as a form of 'negative capability', relishing the possibilities of incompleteness brought about by a rupturing of linearity and sequence. This is furthered by her easiness with tension and duality, coupling forgetfulness with history, conflating temporalities, repeating and cyclical time, working both inside and outside of genre and story. Finally, if Child's work can be seen as one which embraces 'negative capability', it does so with an emphasis on 'negative': the text is assured in its capability to fail to cohere, to be between meanings, to embrace complication and fragment. This emphasis on the fragment furthers Child's idea of the 'infinite'; ideas can spiral outwards by not being closed off or framed by any concept of a 'complete' idea, and are not unidirectional through being forced into a linear cause-and-effect timeline.

These tensions are certainly present in the section of text which follows this assertion of negative capability. Here Child describes, '*[a]s clear as I can see it*', a landscape which is '*[r]ough and expansive, wet and dry, angles irritation cogs smooth-running fondness mixed, not anything but everything and silence. Held together by the wires of its exhilaration*'.<sup>67</sup> The contradictions within the description serve to mesh together several landscapes in a reader's mind, at once 'expansive' and 'angled', 'wet and dry', containing 'irritation' and 'fondness'. This mesh is '[h]eld together by the wires of its exhilaration', its formal innovation and newness being the thing which

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<sup>66</sup> John Keats, 'Letter to J. H. Reynolds, 22 November 1817', in *The Major Works*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 367-8 (p. 368)

<sup>67</sup> Child, *A Motive for Mayhem*, p. 12

binds it together. Through this meshing, time in Child's work is also meshed. The text changes tenses frequently, and this is matched by its shifting foci. Through the five pages of the piece the focus shifts from the past (archive footage, film noir) to the present (a reflection on the process of writing and reading the text, as it is happening) and then to the future in the form of a manifesto for making work and for living in the world. Histories within the text are both excavated and generated so that '[t]he not-previous becomes present, is named, to eat away the boundaries of the art' (p. 12). Through imitating and then disrupting cinematic narrative time, Child questions *whose* time and *whose* narrative it is. By then creating a form in which time is fluid and meanings circulate and cross-pollinate, rather than close off and fix meanings, Child expands the boundaries of text, setting the past, present and future in a form of feedback loop which both echo and inform each other, rather than a unidirectional line of causality where one fixed action leads unavoidably to another. Child 'misappropriate[s] this moment' of film noir history by recontextualising and rearranging it. She 'demands its emergence' through excessive repetition, making difference visible through an emphasis of sameness. We 'blunder' through the text in acts of forgetting and repetition which create looping temporalities and open out the present to an eternal horizon. Gender and sexuality are rethought through this opening out, and Child lets us dwell in this horizon, where gender and sexuality are 'unbounded' from their past fixity, and the queer future has not yet been imagined.

### III. PULSATING: THE TEMPORALITY OF SEX IN DODIE BELLAMY'S *CUNT-UPS*

I'm getting quicker at cutting up the body I was born with.  
—Dodie Bellamy, *Cunt-Ups*

Dodie Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups* is a text which utilizes William Burroughs' 'cut-up' technique<sup>68</sup> to create a series of twenty-one interrelating pornographic texts. Bellamy details her writing process in the afterword to the text:

*Cunt-Ups* is a hermaphroditic salute to William Burroughs and Kathy Acker. I started the project as cut-ups [....] I used a variety of texts written by myself and others. Per Burroughs' rather vague instructions, I cut each page of this material into four squares [....] I taped the new Frankenstein page together, typed it into my computer and then reworked the material.<sup>69</sup>

Bellamy, by using her own pornographic texts, the pornography of others, and various source texts belonging to other genres and time periods, creates a kind of subjectless and objectless pornography. She enacts a perverse queering of narrative which is not supported by a power structure of subject and object (usually man and woman) but, rather, sexualizes every vocabulary it comes into contact with. It pushes pornography to its extreme, in that it creates a sexualised universe within the text, and exposes the mechanisms and power structures of the pornographic narrative.

Bellamy states that the project began as an exercise in 'exploring pornographic language. Pornographic language, I think, is pretty much a male

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<sup>68</sup> Burroughs' cut-up method is a variation of the methods used by Tristan Tzara and Brion Gysin methods, where texts are cut into pieces and rearranged at random. Burroughs introduced the 'fold- in' method employed by Bellamy, where texts are cut into quarters and stuck together to form a new page of writing.

<sup>69</sup> Dodie Bellamy, *Cunt-Ups* (New York: Tender Buttons Press, 2001), p. 67

form. Women are stuck with the more wishy-washy “erotic”.<sup>70</sup> I first want to examine how Bellamy’s text challenges this binary gender divide, and what kind of pornography is produced through the collaging technique of the cu(n)t-up. I also want to posit that the experimental technique Bellamy employs, along with her choice of source materials, creates an internal critique of pornography as a form of social control through narrative linearity. I then want to posit that Bellamy’s ‘cunt-ups’ create a pulsating time predicated upon acts of forgetting, repetition and parataxis, and effected through an experimental writing practice. Finally, I wish to posit that such a time can be considered to be a form of queer subcultural time.

One obvious effect of Bellamy’s use of the cut-up technique is the divorce of gender from sexuality, biological attributes constantly flitting between the male and the female: ‘All you can do is shake your tits, have sex, and use sleeping pills. You strangled me, like a butterfly without wings [...] You move your cock and were arrested’.<sup>71</sup> Because of the reworked state of these texts, typed and set out as conventional prose, the cut-up procedure is at first invisible as a process behind the text. This makes these slippages all the more jarring, and relocates pornography from the male arena to a queer one. However, this process does more than simply transfer sexual relations from between opposite sexes to between same sex subjects. It goes further than this by disintegrating the subjects themselves. The body parts become

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<sup>70</sup> Dodie Bellamy, ‘Low Culture’, *Narrativity* 3  
[http://www.sfsu.edu/~poetry/narrativity/issue\\_three/bellamy.html](http://www.sfsu.edu/~poetry/narrativity/issue_three/bellamy.html) [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011]  
 (para. 24 of 42)

<sup>71</sup> Bellamy, *Cunt-Ups*, p. 18

detached from bodies and subjectivities and become subjects within themselves: 'my teeth stuck out like separate vampires and each touched you. Your nipples have gone to their first place of dying, mine was at the top, no shadows' (p. 58). Objects also become involved in the sexual 'action' of each text: 'it gets dark with blood and tensions, and you encounter a sphere with your hands. Kiss its head and run your lips along something other than a line' (p. 34). Even the landscape is sexualized and a part of the pornographic 'action': '[i]n the sky I thought I might come [...] I have a cunt so that I can fit about the cloud plowed under' (p. 17). This is not a text in which bodies are simply interchangeable. Rather, through the cut-up procedure and the choice of source-texts used, Bellamy has created a pornographic universe in which any vocabulary, landscape, object or body within the text is implicated in a sexual situation. Sexual desire exists within the text not for a particular thing or working towards a particular end or climax. Instead, there is an immanent, pervasive and circulating sexuality present, the result of a text made from what Bellamy describes as 'disembodied shreds of desire' (p. 67).

Because of Bellamy's choice of source texts, other 'vocabularies' infiltrate the pornographic text, serving to change the context of sexual situations and to question the limits of genre. Through Bellamy's conflation of source texts, she challenges what 'vocabularies' are appropriate for the expression of sexual desire within pornography. Like Child, she also highlights the limitation placed on language within this genre, asking what these limitations conceals of the connection between sexuality and other emotions or modes of being. In *Cunt-Ups* this is most apparent when a sexual situation



breaks into a violent one:

I know it's you because you know you're going to fuck me. I like fresh breads. Regarding the other six torsos, I pretend they're your hands, lightly squeezing my breasts, sliding. These torsos have been fucked in acid, then laid on cheap tapestry (p. 29).

Moving from the image of two lovers, to the evocatively homely 'fresh breads', to the disturbing image of torsos soaked in acid and laid on tapestries infiltrating the sexual environment is alarming. These fleeting images of violent crime are a disturbing glitch in the visceral sexual pleasure of the text's language. They occur through Bellamy's use of Jeffrey Dahmer's confessions as a source text for the work. Bellamy justifies this inclusion in her essay 'Body Language', stating that:

I wanted to invade my lovers' frenzy with the awkward temporality of police confession, to bring in the foreign voice of the state, to create an aura of cultural alienation. By abutting Dahmer's confession against my lovers' pornographic rantings, I'm also paying tribute to Burroughs' original purpose for the cut-up, which was to lay bare the mechanics of capitalism's linguistic whitewash.<sup>72</sup>

So, as well as serving to create a kind of pornographic universe in which all objects, landscapes and people become implicated within the action through the pervasive use of pornographic vocabulary, the source texts reveal something about language use and its relationship to power and control. In this case, what Bellamy terms the 'linguistic whitewash' of language use is laid bare through a clash of vocabularies leading to a series of disturbing images.

Sexual situations within the text are also placed in the contexts of war:

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<sup>72</sup> Dodie Bellamy, 'Body Language', *Fascicle 2* (2005)  
 <<http://www.fascicle.com/issue02/essays/bellamy2.htm>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011] (para. 3 of 3)

‘I’ll dab the broken blister on the new battleground’;<sup>73</sup> ‘[m]y clit is hard. I have always welcomed missiles from the people I cared about’ (p. 42). Throughout the text, there are also other contexts that interrupt the pornographic, including zombies, science fiction, computers, the nautical and natural imagery. As well as demonstrating the contextual power of language, this clash of vocabularies also draws attention to the ways in which women’s bodies are described, and the implications of these descriptions. Explicit, pornographic language is used alongside pastoral imagery, drawing parallels between the female body, in particular, and natural landscapes. One such paragraph reads:

Badly I was frightened, but I was able to let go, nipples hardening, one touch of your hand and I go violet with oil and tender sky. I was feeling my cunt lips in the water, “love” has been consummated and we can move. Your breasts petalled openness like a satin negligee that had become flesh. I like that, it makes me think of you (p. 31).

The clichéd metaphor of the female anatomy as a flower, and a reference to the ultra-feminine negligee, can be read as a queer subversion of this overused image through the previous reference to ‘your cock’ (p. 31) in the same paragraph. The conventionally feminine, through being given a metaphorical ‘cock’, becomes transsexual and queerly gendered. The use of ‘violet’ could be seen as both a reference to a homosexual symbol and self-reflexive comment on Bellamy’s parodic use of ‘purple prose’ in this section. It’s also easy to misread as ‘violent’, given the brutality of some sections of the work. Such images in this context raise the question of what kind of body a ‘pornographic’ body is, versus, say, an erotic, romance, science-fiction,

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<sup>73</sup> Bellamy, *Cunt-Ups*, p. 24

horror, academic or scientific body. If the language used in each 'genre' of writing is drastically different, are they all describing the same body? Are the breasts which 'petal...openness like a satin negligee' the same as the 'tits in my face' mentioned earlier in the same passage? Bellamy states: 'I don't want to present a sanitized version of female sexuality, don't want to use beauty to make physicality palatable'.<sup>74</sup> By juxtaposing romanticized images of the female body with other vocabularies such as science, academia and pornography, Bellamy demonstrates the political control that notions of genre and narrative can have over the ways in which sex, sexuality and the gendered body are articulated. I have argued earlier in this chapter that in Child's text the woman is presented as a stage or screen upon which cultural understandings of femininity can be projected. Here, the pornographic texts spliced into the other material sexualize everything they come into contact with. One could view the pornographic material as the bedrock of the text, functioning as the sexual setting, into which zombies, soldiers, murderers, scientists, and many other figures from diverse literatures are inserted and sexualized through the association of their placement.

On Burroughs' cut-up process, N. Katharine Hayles writes that

[n]ormally, narrative fiction leaps over the technologies (printing press, paper, ink) that produce it and represents the external world as if this act of representation did not require a material basis for its production. Burroughs turns this convention inside out, locating the "external" world *inside* the technological artifact. The move constructs a completely different relation between fiction and the material means of its production, constituting the technology as the ground out of which the narrative action evolves.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Bellamy, 'Low Culture' (para. 24 of 42)

<sup>75</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 216

As well as demonstrating the material means by which a text is created, Bellamy's process of writing *Cunt-Ups* performs a similar act upon the concept of narration. She creates a meta-narrative through the meshing of several different ways of 'telling' the body, and the way in which these bodies live and are expressed through language in culture. The text is made of 21 pages spliced together and then reworked by Bellamy into 21 texts, but, from the process and the source materials, hundreds of different combinations of the same texts could have been produced, with wildly varying results and implications. One striking feature of the text, a side effect of Bellamy's choice to investigate pornography as a central issue in the work, is the excessive repetition of pornographic language, alongside the other vocabularies present. The 'shock' value of pornography, as well as its function to arouse and present the human body in a certain way, is lost through sheer repetition. The word 'cock', for example, appears 110 times within the 65 pages of the text, and in one instance appears ten times on the same page. Similarly, the words 'fuck' and 'cunt' appear over 50 times each. This exhaustion of pornographic language functions in a similar way to Child's repetition of film noir motifs: to highlight the limitations of vocabulary and of content inside certain genres, leading one to question what types of bodies and what types of situations are and aren't represented by them. This is a particularly powerful statement when thinking about the work's representations of queer sexualities and fluid gender identities. Contrasted with the stark and repetitious descriptions borrowed from pornography, (the words 'cock', 'cunt', 'pussy', 'tits', 'ass', 'nipple' and 'fuck' appear on almost every page of the work) *Cunt-Ups*, which

seems to create an entire universe of sexual desire, makes pornography seem almost military in its uniformity, and strips it of any power it might have through its secrecy by repeating these 'taboo' words ad nauseam.

Each of the 21 cut-ups becomes a cross-section of the mesh of source texts used, the capturing of a single moment blind to anything but the present. This again recalls Halberstam's figuring of 'queer temporalities' which, with a threatened future and a disturbed past, are left with the present as the point of focus. The 'queer temporality' here is the eternal revision of the moment at hand, rather than a linearity of past, present and future. The individual 'cut-ups' have this feel of being rooted only in the present as the text moves, breathlessly, from one image to the text, flitting between landscapes, genders and contexts. As well as highlighting the uniformity of pornographic language, the repetitions within the text serve as a reference point that hold these moments together and allow them to interact with each other to create a pulsating time. The text flits between tenses often, as the following passage illustrates:

I would lay down and beg for your cock, I would be ashamed to lay yours under mine. You were telling. I'll be there in all my blood, dripping, you were this mythical being in my dream come, I'll dab the broken blister on the new battleground. Even more than before, I imagine that won't be a problem.<sup>76</sup>

In this brief extract the tense moves from the conditional, to the past, to the future, back to the past, then back to the future. There are also references to recent and distant past events of varying ages and durations: 'around 1900 I spurted' (p. 26), 'this was ten years ago' (p. 30), 'once when the earth was

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<sup>76</sup> Bellamy, *Cunt-Ups*, p. 24

young I cleansed your toes with tears' (p. 32), 'I am kissing you for a really long time, about 25 years' (p. 37). These references to the distant past and to long durations of time are juxtaposed with the supposed immediacy of sexual action in the pornographic tradition, where as a reader you would expect to be placed in the midst of the sexual action as it unfolds in 'real' time, the act of sex being the focus and dictating the time span of the work. From the immediacy of the moment to the expanse of history and back again as the text forgets and begins again, Bellamy's writing expands and contracts in focus to give the effect of a pulsating temporality.

This temporality also has the effect simultaneity due to the sheer pace of its pulse. Moving from one image/context/timezone to another, what has come previously leaves a trace in the next moment, a ghost in the reader's mind. Bellamy places the 'now' of the action of the text (often explicitly sexual) within other contexts and other times – zombie and vampire films, pastoral scenes, the biblical, Jeffrey Dahmer's murders between 1978 and 1991 – queering the representation of these times through their association with the queer sexuality of the 'action' of the text. The effect of this, as with Child's work, is that the text questions existing narrative forms and the limits they place on modes of expression, particularly in relation to sexuality and the body. Through doing this, the text also creates an alternate formulation of time which, as it references past and future, pulsates in the present to change and revise perceptions of what and how events and people are represented, and what the political implications of formal structures such as narrative do to subjectivities.

As with Child's text and film, there are several types of temporality at work here. Firstly, the text's continual generation of new combinations of sexualized objects and subjects enacts a kind of forgetting. This is an amnesiac text, due to its mode of construction. The cut-up technique creates ruptures in the linearity of narrative meaning that necessitate shifts of attention on the part of the reader as the text 'forgets' what came before it and moves into a new context, a new time. Each 'character' or 'scene' within the text must also 'forget' its associations with its original context as it is forced to bind itself to a new one. The pornographic source material acts as a kind of erotic Midas touch, sexualizing and queering all the other vocabularies and signifiers it comes into contact with and effecting a 'forgetting' of (or in Bellamy's words, becoming 'disembodied' from) their original context and purpose.

However, these shreds of other types of vocabularies also complicate the eroticism of the text through placing the language of pornography within a wider context of violence, science, academic thought and nature. Pornography is a genre, and genre (like gender) relies on remembering and repeating what has come before: it follows a form. The recognition of genre on the part of the reader also relies on this memory. Through utilizing Burroughs' method of text collage, Bellamy enacts a forgetting of genre, gender, of kind. Halberstam, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, uses collage as an example of a form of art that enacts a queer 'unbeing' and refusing to cohere. She writes that this is achieved through a lack of respect for boundaries: '[c]ollage precisely references the spaces inbetween and refuses to respect the

boundaries that usually delineate self from other, art object from museum, and the copy from the original'.<sup>77</sup> By conflating many different types of bodies, languages, times and contexts, Bellamy sheds light on the 'linguistic whitewashing' of genre and its limiting effects on representation and expression. Furthermore, through collage, she creates a queer kind of pulsating time which exists in a tension between remembering what lies outside of genre and forgetting genre to free up the space for something new. Never one or the other, the text pulsates in the messy space between remembering and forgetting, contextualization and decontextualization. This problematic in-between space in which the text dwells is precisely what makes its temporality queer: torn between bringing to light the forgotten, the rejected, the excluded from the queer archive (dramatized in this case through Bellamy's use of what doesn't "belong" within a genre and through the queering of gender and sexuality by collaging multiple genders and sexualities together) and, in this very act, letting go of storytelling and remembering, of genre, of narrative, of expected forms, in order to produce a new queer text, a new queer time.

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<sup>77</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 136



#### IV. LAGGING: ANACHRONISTIC AND AMNESIAC TEMPORALITY IN SHE!

I now wish to discuss how I pervert and misappropriate narrative genre fiction in my own creative practice. To explore the complex and troubling relationship between queer history, narrative and time, I wanted to begin with an established form and work towards queering it. At the same time, I wanted to explore the concept of narrative itself, to investigate ways of expressing queer sexuality in a non- exploitative and non-minoritising way that did not replicate the power structures it evoked. Having a longstanding interest in, and problematic relationship with, lesbian literature, I sympathized with Roof's dissatisfaction, which became the starting point for writing *Come As You Are*:

why, no matter how sympathetic, clever, radical or well-meaning the author, the circumstance, the occasion, is the story of the lesbian always really the same old story and her fate the same old vaguely oppressed fate whether she is the protagonist or a minor character? [...] If culture is defined by and defines the story--if narrative is a means of cultural evaluation and oppression—must we change the story and the role that the lesbian plays in it to alter the lesbian's place in culture?<sup>78</sup>

In thinking through Roof's comments, and my own dissatisfaction with the representation of lesbianism in narrative fiction, I began to think about the politics of lesbian pulp fiction novels of the 1950s and 60s. The combination of the development of new technologies, allowing for cheap mass production of paperbacks, and the shift in moral attitudes post World War II, occasioned the increased interest in the figure of the lesbian, and increased the visibility of homosexuality. As Suzanna Danuta Walters points out, '[f]or all their wild improbability, these novels are records, traces of an existence deeply

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<sup>78</sup> Roof, *Come As You Are*, p. xxv-xxvi

submerged and repressed'.<sup>79</sup> The birth of the genre of Lesbian Pulp Fiction in the 1940s was a breaking point in the history of homosexuality, the moment where it entered mainstream culture, particularly in the United States, due to the rise in publishing of cheap paperback originals. As my research progressed, I became fascinated by the schismatic nature of the texts, and their sociological implications. On the one hand, what Yvonne Keller describes as a 'public lesbian culture'<sup>80</sup> was made available to the general populous for the first time, for consumption alongside other forms of titillating genre fiction. The mass-market paperback originals published by such presses as Fawcett Gold Medal opened the floodgates in terms of what or whose stories could be told, and consequently there were compromises in the standards of both quality and censorship. Paperback original publishing not only opened the market to the derivative and second rate: marginal, subversive and controversial ideas also found expression there. It is through this loophole that the 'pro-lesbian subgenre' (p. 6) of texts – that is, texts written by lesbians and for lesbians rather than titillating and voyeuristic stories (what Marion Zimmer Bradley, in her bibliography of lesbian texts, labels as 'scv' or 'short course in voyeurism')<sup>81</sup> designed for a male heterosexual readership – were allowed into print.

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<sup>79</sup> Suzanna Danuta Walters, 'As Her Hand Crept Slowly Up Her Thigh: Ann Bannon and the Politics of Pulp', *Social Text: Theory/Culture/Ideology* 23 (1989), pp. 83-101 (p. 83)

<sup>80</sup> Yvonne Keller, 'Pulp Politics: Strategies of Vision in Pro-Lesbian Pulp Novels 1955-1965' in *The Queer Sixties*, Ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1-25 (p. 19)

<sup>81</sup> Marion Zimmer Bradley and Gene Damon, *Checklist 1960: A complete, cumulative checklist of lesbian, variant and homosexual fiction, in English or available in English translation, with supplements of related material, for the use of collectors, students and librarians* (Rochester: Marion Zimmer Bradley, 1960), p. 4

On the other hand, what might seem to be an incredibly liberating moment in the history of minority literature is one that occurred within the strict confines of 1950s McCarthy-era society. Kate Adams describes the time as

a decade notable for its increasingly conservative attitude towards lesbianism in particular and women's sexual and social identity in general. In the early 1950s, a reactionary medical community damned Alfred Kinsey's sex research and his relatively progressive findings regarding the nature of women's sexual response and homoerotic experience. In the same years, the psychoanalytic establishment institutionalized a "sickness theory" model of homosexual behaviour which would affect the medical and cultural treatment, as well as the self-perception, of the lesbian for years to come.<sup>82</sup>

With this in mind, it seems even more revolutionary that these texts came to print at all. However, the confines of the time often meant that the genre of Lesbian Pulp Fiction, no matter how pro-lesbian the text, had certain formulaic and conservative plotlines to adhere to. Lesbians were represented as deviant through the ending of the texts, the characters often either 'saved' from their homosexuality by men or left destitute. Plotlines, characters and situations were often repeated between texts, and the rigid and predictable structure of these texts was something I wanted to work with creatively, acknowledging pulp's place in queer history whilst parodying the stock characters and paint-by-number narratives that the cultural environment of the time insisted upon.

This complex relationship between liberation and prohibition also prompted me back to thinking about the relationship between remembering and forgetting that occurs in the work of Bellamy and Child. On the one hand, I felt the need to pay homage to these objects from the queer archive of

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<sup>82</sup> Kate Adams, 'Making the World Safe for the Missionary Position: Images of the Lesbian in Post-World War II America', in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, Ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990) pp. 255 - 274 (p. 256)

history, to remember them through my text. On the other hand, the limitations of these texts made me wonder whether they didn't do more harm than good. Characterized by unhappy endings and the public airing of perverse or inverse desires for the pleasure of the heterosexual masses, the lesbian pulp didn't seem like something to unproblematically 'remember' in my creative practice. Love picks up on this difficulty in *Feeling Backward*. On the one hand, she states that '[a]s queer readers we tend to see ourselves as reaching back towards isolated figures in the queer past in order to rescue or save them'.<sup>83</sup> However, examining moments of the past when same-sex desire became more visible (in this case Love is debating the ethics of representation in the 1961 film adaptation of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*), she writes that

the introduction of more explicit representations of lesbianism was hardly an unambiguous victory. If female same-sex desire becomes more visible in the 1960s, it is only as a lamentable perversion, inextricably linked with images of loneliness, shame, and failure. (p. 15)

I felt that this comment holds true for the lesbian pulp fiction genre to some extent, and wanted to explore this tension between visibility and exploitation, between the freedom and the danger of representation. In doing this, I wanted to at once pay tribute by remembering, and at the same time problematize this through an experimental text which forgets and reimagines the lesbian pulp. Through doing this, I wanted to queer the linear narrative of the pulp genre and create a form of queer temporality in *SHE!*, which would rely on a tension between anachronistic acts of 'remembering' and amnesiac acts of 'forgetting' queer history.

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<sup>83</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 8

I also became interested in the narrative formula of the pulp novel as a dramatization of Roof's theory of the heteroideology of narrative, as the novels make explicit the relationship between social control, narrative structure and sexuality. The narrative of the Lesbian Pulp must titillate the reader by presenting the lesbian as a spectre of perversion, and at the same time as condemning her to an unhappy ending. The rigid and formulaic structure of the lesbian pulp novel was established early on so that any text produced (with a few notable exceptions) could be poured into a metaphorical mould, a prototype of the lesbian pulp, almost to the extent that one story is indistinguishable from the next aside from character names. As I read over fifty of these novels whilst researching the project, I found I could not separate out the plot lines of each one. Inspired by Child's treatment of the film noir genre, I wanted to use the confines of this narrative form by pushing the formula to its limit and create a kind of caricature of the lesbian pulp in order to break this mould from the inside and explore the complex politics of narrative and sexuality through this.

I began by appropriating material from the lesbian pulp novels I had collected. I made a list of the most common words, phrases and themes, hoping to appropriate these in my own practice. I also started making lists of names and character attributes of the protagonists to start to build portraits or descriptions. All these texts started with the phrase 'she was late home', a phrase that appears multiple times in *The Edge of Twilight*,<sup>84</sup> one of the pulp fiction texts used as a source material for *SHE!*. I was drawn to the phrase because of its complexity when considered in the context of the lesbian. I was

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<sup>84</sup> Paula Christian, *The Edge of Twilight* (London: L. Miller & Co., 1959)

interested in the concept of being 'late', implying a temporal lag, and the concept of 'home' in relation to both sexuality and narrative. Gloria Anzaldúa writes of the irony of slippage between 'homo' and 'home' (she cites that one of her students thought that 'homophobia' meant being scared of returning home at the end of a college semester). Anzaldúa reads this slippage as implying that metaphorically a queer subject has no home, dwelling in a perpetual borderland, never a 'legitimate inhabitant' of her or his own culture.<sup>85</sup> I was interested in the connection of this concept of homelessness and borderlands to the phrase 'she was late home', thinking that this phrase might symbolize in some ways the position of the lesbian in relation to hegemony. 'Home' in relation to literature can also be read as both the material object of the book and as narrative: official and recognized environments for holding and organizing 'telling' and self-expression, which the lesbian is historically external to, and consequently 'homeless'. 'Late' as a temporal term also interested me in terms of thinking about the representation of the lesbian in pulp novels. I saw parallels between the figure of the lesbian and Child's representation of woman as the object of desire in 'A Motive for Mayhem': associated with darkness (much of the 'action' between women in pulp novels takes place at night, in underground bars, and metaphorically the 'true' lesbian of the text is an emblem of lust and sin), representative of the threatening 'other' in a paranoid and conservative 1950s society (modern, as in 'of late'), and also as a temporality at work in my text. Using characters from 1950s lesbian pulp could be seen as an anachronistic move on my part;

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<sup>85</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1987) p. 3-4

despite the multitude of positive, post-stonewall lesbian icons of art and culture, I have decided to focus on a time and genre in which the lesbian was repressed, pathologized and caricatured. Such features make me at least partially out of synch and out of time with my contemporary environment, through this choice of source material. The figure therefore comes 'late' to my text, a marker of times past. Abutting these words in the phrase 'she was late home' also implies a homecoming, the resituating of this figure in a more permissive and experimental literary space.

This anachronistic move, effecting a temporal lag within the text, was also inspired by Love's concept of backwardness as a feature of queer writing. Love writes that '[o]ver the last century, queers have embraced backwardness in many forms: in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn attachment to lost objects'.<sup>86</sup> The phrase 'she was late home' enacts a form of backwardness that holds the 'she' of the text in tension between time and place. On the one hand, 'she' is remembered through my use of pulp fiction as a source text and thematic inspiration (and so being brought 'home' 'late' to the safety of the experimental and liberating 21<sup>st</sup> century queer text). On the other hand, through this lateness and my recontextualisation 'she' is in some ways lost to history, disappeared, forgotten. Through my use of parataxis and text collage from multiple source materials, 'she' is forgotten in her original (linear, hegemonic, whole) form and dispersed across pages and centuries, disembodied and reworked.

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<sup>86</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, p. 7

As I continued to write, I decided to remove character names from the text and use simply 'she' each time. In doing this I was inspired by Child's use of 'he' and 'she' as the markers of generic film noir characters. I wanted to create a sense of continuity through using 'she' whilst disrupting the idea of a 'whole' or formed character through unrelated and repetitive descriptions. The sentences and portraits become more repetitive as this part of the text continues, a series of paratactic statements, with no stable subject, but rather the superficial pretense of one. Pretense was important to me at this point; I wanted the text, at first glance, to appear as a lesbian pulp novel, and have formatted the text accordingly. I felt that through doing this, the discontinuity would be enhanced and seem more alienating, like Bellamy's reformatted cut-ups or 'cunt-ups'. In doing this I hoped to create a double effect: firstly, to highlight the limitations of narrative through pushing those limitations (in this case, the repeated stock characters and plot lines of lesbian pulp fiction), and, secondly, through incongruous descriptions which do not build to what Roof terms the 'productive singularity' of narrative and a 'whole' self, to illustrate ways in which hegemony polarizes gender and caricatures sexuality, by drawing attention to the multitude of 'incongruous' identities which exist outside of this. In one part of the text, for example

[s]he created faux night across the city for the purpose of seduction. She always had six or seven inches to spare. She was a house-bird, she was as jealous as a poet, she was the taxonomy of urban drag personified.

Whilst representing elements of queer culture (the 'faux night' links back to 'she was late home', and 'six or seven inches to spare' can be read as phallic, reinforced by the reference to 'drag'), this 'description' does not



accumulatively build itself into the image of a person but, rather, stays with, in Roof's words, the 'risky multiplicity' of the perverse. It explores the multifarious possibilities of identity without creating a unidirectional line of narrative which might narrow down these possibilities by accumulating agreeing statements about a single identity. This, I hope, makes the text seem full of possibilities, and contrasts with my use of repetition, which aims to highlight the limitations of the lesbian pulp narrative, and (by implication) narrative more generally, therefore challenging its 'heteroideology'.

This technique of repetition as parataxis to destabilize and interrogate notions of gender, sexuality, and genre was also influenced by Redell Olsen's sequence of poems entitled 'Corrupted by Showgirls'. The poems work through images from film noir and Busby Berkeley films, and in doing so conflate genders and subjectivities to produce an empowered and queer subject. In first poem in the sequence we are told: '[w]hat can be said is said about her. A 'reality test' would test for what? At other times, in order to put myself in the across the footlights I have to imagine I am a man who sews'.<sup>87</sup> As well as conflating the 'I' and 'she' of speaker and subject, the poem, through an ekphrastic practice of describing performance, shifts pronouns and implies that gender itself might be a performance: scratching under the surface, there is no authentic self to discover, no absolute 'reality' to test for. Similarly, each iteration of 'she' is not meant to build, conceal, or shift any authentic or essential 'she' but rather to reveal the performative and mutable nature of representations of the self.

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<sup>87</sup> Redell Olsen, *Secure Portable Space* (Hastings: Reality Street, 2004), p. 9

By utilizing a similar repetition in my writing practice, I also hoped to undermine the confines of genre, whilst appearing to represent or mimic them. I was interested in the way in which the spectre of the lesbian in pulp fiction has retrospectively been read as an icon of threat, danger and otherness, brought about by anti-communist paranoia and the threat of nuclear war. I wanted to explore this spectre, which both frightened and fascinated 1950s American culture, by using 'she' as an axis around which to organize a world. Like the universal sexualization which occurs in Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups*, 'she' embodies and stands for everything within the first part of the text: 'she was deep graphix', 'she was my cousin', 'she was a sexual sparrow', 'she was a gloomier place', 'she was a discontinued typecast', 'she was an unidentifiable artwork', 'she was a temporary remedy'. In a move which I hope signifies both a rebellion against the exclusion of the lesbian in the 'home' of narrative and the symbolic caricaturing of the lesbian as a representative of all that threatens, 'she' can be seen in two ways. On the one hand 'she' takes over and embodies all aspects of the universe created in the text. 'She' is not an identity that carries forward the narrative plotline; rather, 'she' saturates the worlds into which she is entered, and thus everything becomes on her terms. On the other hand, the historical exploitation of 'she' is performed in the text through a palimpsest of meanings being laid over 'her' in the third person, so that it becomes in some ways an involuntary embodiment of whatever is assigned to her. Coupled with the saturated universe of 'she', this practice investigates and demonstrates the complex relationship between queer sexuality, the temporality of queer history, and narrative representation.

This relationship works on several levels. Firstly, as Roof outlines, narrative is by default aligned with hegemony as a heteroideology which produces and reproduces the limitations and prejudices in which we live. Therefore, in Kevin Killian's words, for queer writers 'narrative is a faulty analogue for our experiences'.<sup>88</sup> I feel the same way as Roof about the representation of the lesbian in narrative fiction, and for similar reasons. The lesbian, even when portrayed in a sympathetic or permissive light, cannot escape from the replication of dominant heterosexual ideology from which she has been excluded. Such narratives can never fully become queer, or become an 'analogue for our experiences'. The most they can achieve in terms of subversiveness is a reactionary imitation of heterosexuality, a liberationist (rather than ethnic) model of sexual politics which seeks nothing more than to replicate the system which oppresses it: a faulty logic. Gregory W. Bredbeck notes this in his analysis of one of the most famous lesbian pulp texts, Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker*, stating that it has the effect of constructing the normative melodrama of lesbian tragedy in its narrative, but at the same time positing an effect—a narrativity—that limits the totalizing effects of this cultural form...so, too, is the formulation implicit in the desire for gay [as opposed to queer] critique, *the desire to use a system to enact a system that is different*.<sup>89</sup>

So, in Bredbeck's analysis, *Beebo Brinker* goes some way towards undermining the model of 'lesbian tragedy' embedded within the lesbian pulp's narrative form, partly through Bannon's rebellious decision to create a rare happy ending within the novel. However, its politics are always

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<sup>88</sup> quoted in Gregory W. Bredbeck, 'The New Queer Narrative: Intervention and Critique', *Textual Practice* 9 (1995), pp. 477-497 (p. 489)

<sup>89</sup> Bredbeck, 'The New Queer Narrative', p. 482

recuperated by the totalizing system of narrative because it expresses this rebellion *within* narrative rather than seeking to disentangle itself from its heteroideology. In some ways, the repeating 'she' of *SHE!* represents the futility of this struggle. Even the pronoun 'she' is so saturated with assumptions, meanings and implications that an escape from hegemonic structures of gender and sexuality are impossible within this language. The embodiment of objects, states of mind, spaces, and selves that 'she' takes on in my text can be seen as an expression of frustration at this inescapability within narrative. These repetitions mimic the limitations of the pulp novel highlighted by Bredbeck in order to convey the futility of expressing subjectivities outside of dominant ideologies.

Secondly, the narrative model is broken by moving away from a sense of fixed identity. 'She' as a 'subject' is dispersed across landscapes and decades to create unstable and multiple subject positions and to conflate subject and object together. As well as queering the lesbian pulp novel through breaking the mould of linear narrative, this repetition creates a form of non-linear queer time which, in turn, reflects the history of queer existence. By shifting the text from narrative singularity and cause-and-effect reproductive logic to multiplicity and paratactic repetition, time becomes 'stuck' in the text. Meaning does not accumulate but rather shifts on a level plane or horizon. This could be seen as a form of the 'eternal present', as seen in Bellamy's and Child's texts, exploiting, like Halberstam's formulation of 'queer temporality', the 'potential of the moment' which 'squeezes new possibilities out of the time at

hand'.<sup>90</sup>

This is furthered a little later in the text, through repeated references to the 'first' ('first day', 'first night', 'first waking dream', 'first game'), lists of things which punctuate the increasingly incoherent prose sections of the text. These lists, and the paratactic repetitions more generally, function as a starting over, always beginning again with meaning and reconsidering or rewriting what has come before, rather than using what has come before to accumulate meaning in the form of a linear narrative. This refusal to accumulate meaning can be seen as a politically potent act. To work always in the present and to constantly 'think again' implies a fruitful escape from the linear logic of hegemonic art production, as well as a more general political action. By refusing to let the past shape the future, a powerful form of unknowing can emerge which opens out the possibilities of the moment. Repetition as a writing process queers temporality by simultaneously recalling and forgetting the queer archive.

This focus on the present of 'queer time' produced by queered narratives also reflects the history of queer sexuality. When the history of a minoritized group is so full of silence, invisibility and being (by force) *out* of time, and, on the other hand, being made visible by harmful acts of legislation, pathology and perverse fascination, nostalgia for the past seems absurd. At the same time, as Halberstam argues, the threat of 'no future' in queer subculture, the 'narrowing horizons of possibility', mean that a future-orientated way of writing is less possible. Thus the 'urgency of being' in the present is emphasized, and

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<sup>90</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 2

*SHE!* reflects this model of queer time to some extent. Additionally, by recalling and revising anachronistic figures and modes of expression in queer history, through the imitation and investigation of the lesbian pulp, as well as the use of past iconography of lesbian culture such as the archetypal 'dyke', cross-dressing and masculinity, embed visible moments of queer history into the 'queer time' of the repeating moment of the present. Like Child and Bellamy, *SHE!* exploits the techniques of hegemony in order to expose the mechanisms of dominant modes of telling, thus perverting and queering the heteroideology of narrative. This, in turn, creates a form of queer time which becomes a political call to action, as well as an ethnographic surfacing of anachronistic models of lesbian representation: to revise, to shift, to question, and to recreate the existing models of expression available to us. To remember, in order that we might be able to forget.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### ‘THE SPACE GETS OCCUPIED’: QUEER SPATIALITIES

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#### I. SPATIALISING SEXUALITY

Space calls for action.  
—Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Bonnie Zimmerman, writing in 1992, notes that studies in sexuality have become ‘less [about] the act of seeing...than the place from which one sees’.<sup>91</sup> The critical shift from Lesbian and Gay Studies to Queer Theory from the early 1990s onwards, coupled with Judith Butler’s groundbreaking work on gender, have placed emphasis on the malleability of both gender and sexuality. The concept of identity is increasingly spatialized as the ‘self’ becomes perceived more as a mobile perspective or subject position than an identity per se. In Cindy Patton’s words, for queers, ‘identity operates performatively in a practical and temporary space, a situation, if you will’.<sup>92</sup> The focus thus becomes about the situation a body is placed in and what the world looks like from that place, rather than any notion of what a body unchangeably or authentically *is*. This shift from essential identity to spatially contingent sexuality and gender identity has also allowed for increased malleability of the self in writing, particularly linguistically experimental writing, where the notion of a stable, fixed self has always been under interrogation. Having

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<sup>91</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman, ‘Lesbians Like This and That: Some Notes on Lesbian Criticism for the Nineties’, in *New Lesbian Criticism*, ed. Sally Munt (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 1-15 (p. 3)

<sup>92</sup> Cindy Patton, ‘Tremble, Hetero Swine!’, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) pp. 143-177 (p. 148)

demonstrated in the first part of my thesis how narrative experimentation results in forms of queer time, I now wish to look at how experimenting with poetic spatiality in different ways results in forms of temporary queer space, which in turn affect the bodies which inhabit these spaces.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I discussed the relationship between sexuality, time, and narrative, highlighting possible inconsistencies between queerness and hegemonic structures of time, and arguing that writing texts which disrupt the pervasive power of linear narratives might allow for other understandings of time which operate outside of and critique hegemony through refusing temporalities organized around reproductive meaning. Likewise, in this chapter, I wish to look at the way in which presumed heterosexuality and understandings of space are linked, and argue that through thematically and formally queering space, experimental poetics might allow for non-heterosexual bodies and voices to emerge. Just as in Chapter One I question the suitability of the linear narrative for queer life paths and histories, my analysis of treatments of public, domestic and literary forms of space by contemporary writers allows for a renewed consideration of the limitations and controls of spatial structures upon notions of sexuality and gender identity.

Using recent feminist and queer revisions of phenomenology and spatiality as tools for thinking about the relationship between modes of spatiality and gender/sexual identity, I wish to look at three texts: Caroline Bergvall's *Éclat*, kari edwards' *iduna*, and my own work *SHE!*. Through close readings of each text, I hope to demonstrate how each negotiates public and



private spaces, using subcultural and 'outsider' positions to navigate, disrupt and queer heterosexual space in order to create temporary utopian spaces in which the queer body can become visible, extend itself and be at 'home'. Furthermore, I wish to demonstrate that just as Child and Bellamy challenge habitual perceptions of time, narrative and history through textual disruptions of linearity, these texts work to draw renewed attention to the concept of space in relation to sexuality. They work to question the universal nature of phenomenology's account of space and subject formation, and offer alternative 'orientations' towards spaces which allow the queer body to emerge. Thirdly, I wish to argue for the necessarily transitory nature of such queer spaces. Through examining the three texts alongside recent thinking in the field of queer studies on the topics of unhappiness and negativity, I wish to argue for the necessity of acknowledging and using positions of liminality and social exclusion through the languages of violence, unhappiness and pain. As well as creating utopian queer spaces, I wish to argue that all three texts must also necessarily confront socially regulated space and acknowledge the oppressive and harmful nature of such spaces upon queer bodies. Furthermore, I will posit that such representations of space might be an important part of what makes a queer and political poetic practice.

Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* analyses the relationship between identity and the space one inhabits. Bachelard examines aspects of the home and their relationship to an individual's psychological health and sense of identity. Our childhood home, Bachelard argues, is throughout our

lives in a 'passionate liaison'<sup>93</sup> with our bodies, affecting forever the way in which we experience space and learn to feel 'at home' in ourselves: '[w]e are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme' (p. 15). Bachelard's home is familiar to the extent that it orders being; he states that 'in the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being' (p. 7). Importantly, a defining ordering feature of Bachelard's home is its *linearity*. The (childhood or ideal) home is imagined as a 'vertical' house (in that it runs straight up from cellar to attic) and 'concentrated', in that 'it appeals to our consciousness of centrality' (p. 17), and thus it orders the psyche. The combination of the implication of unity between self and home – its familiarity to and protection of the self – and the interrelated spatial ordering of home and self imply alignment, harmony and interdependence. This 'home' is a space of stability 'that has invited us to come out of ourselves' (p. 11). Here the home is both subjective – in that it shapes or impresses itself upon the individual's physicality – and universal, in that this process stems from the arguably privileged presumption of a standardized notion of a (material) house and a (conceptual) home. In *The Poetics of Space*, a person is welcome and at ease in their home, relatively free from social, cultural and economic variations and restrictions. Such disruptions would perhaps result in an entirely different 'diagram' and thus produce a different kind of body, a different 'self'.

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<sup>93</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) p. 15

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed uses existential phenomenology as a tool for examining how 'orientation' is variable and biased towards white heterosexual experience. Ahmed posits that 'phenomenology is full of queer moments',<sup>94</sup> which are moments of 'disorientation', such as Bachelard's homeless and 'dispersed being'. In phenomenological theory, Ahmed argues, philosophical meaning arises from the *reorientation* of the subject under these conditions, the 'queer moment' overcome. However, Ahmed argues for the significance of 'disorientation' as a way of understanding the queer body's negotiation of socially biased space, so that these moments become 'a source of vitality' (p. 4). Thus, when a body departs from 'the skin of the social', positive reformulations of space, queered through a change in perception and spatial experience, might be possible.

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<sup>94</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 4

## II. MORPHING: QUEER ARCHITECTURE IN CAROLINE BERGVALL'S *ÉCLAT*

Well, if a straight line be the shortest distance between two points, where would that leave us my dove.

—Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*

In Caroline Bergvall's *Éclat*, the shift from hegemonic to queer space occurs in three stages: outsider status, occupation of domestic space, and a morphing of that space by the outsider. This morphing creates a temporary space which facilitates an 'intimate immensity' of sexual excess. I will examine these stages through looking at architectural features of the house, and how they work as metaphorically significant political tools within the text.

*Éclat* was originally presented under the title *Éclat—Occupation des Lieux 1- 10*. Its initial form under this title was as an audio guided tour of the Institute of Rot, a Victorian house and art space in London. The piece was reworked and designed in book form in collaboration with Marit Münzberg. The aesthetics of the book are akin to a map or guide, with graphics that hint at blueprints or architectural plans, and with verbal and graphic directions, signposts and instructions for the reader to navigate the space. Bergvall seems to use the book form self-reflexively, and features of the text draw attention to the material construction of the book as an object. The first page of text reads '**WEL** is an occupation **COME**',<sup>95</sup> and the word(s) '**WEL COME**' are traced backward in grey on the second page, a concretization of the material 'shadow' of words:

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<sup>95</sup> Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat* (Lowestoft: Sound and Language, 1996) p. 7

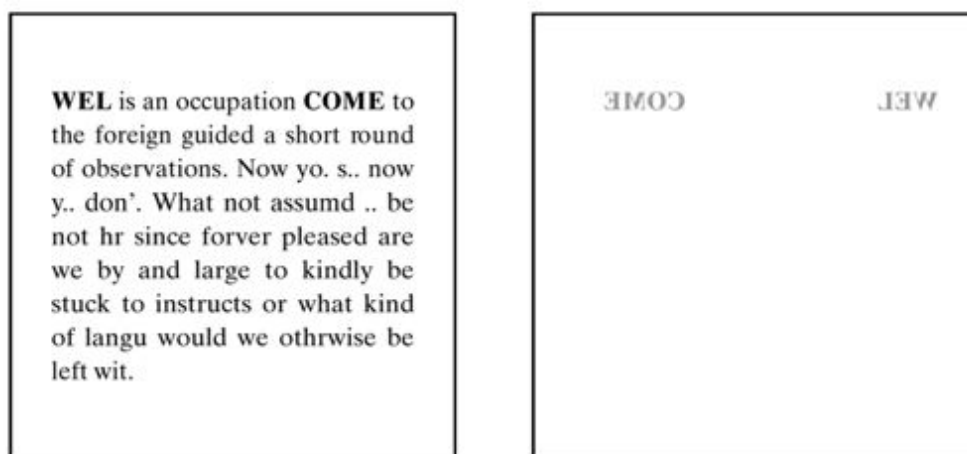


Figure 1. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, pages 7-8

The capitalized and bold font of the ‘**WEL...COME**’ can be compared to a welcome mat or sign, an invitation to enter. However, the tracing of the word on the other side of the page have the effect of allowing the reader to view the ‘wrong’ or ‘back’ side of language, the backward or opposite of welcome, being unwelcome or shut out. Being on the ‘wrong’ or back side of language, of approaching art or history from a reorientated position, is something which has roots in the tradition of feminist avant- garde poetics. Redell Olsen’s *Book of the Fur* deals with the intersection between fur as a commodity and representation of female sexuality. In an interview with Lucy Sheerman, Olsen draws a parallel between the smooth and ‘furry’ sides of animal skin and a gendered approach to textual practice: ‘I was wondering if women writers might be on the hairy/furry side of writing and what it might be like to try and write a text that acknowledged this furriness’.<sup>96</sup> The idea of writing on the

<sup>96</sup> Lucy Sheerman, ‘Lucy Sheerman discusses *Book of the Fur* with its writer Redell Olsen’, Vol. 1, issue 5 (2001)

<[http://www.asu.edu/piper/cwcenter/how2journal/archive/online\\_archive/v1\\_5\\_2001/current/workbook/sheerman.html](http://www.asu.edu/piper/cwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_5_2001/current/workbook/sheerman.html)> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2011] (para. 20 of 29)

‘furry’ side suggests difficulty, perhaps writing on the ‘wrong’ side, and an acknowledgement of this difference and difficulty might address and work through both textual and sexual difference. Similarly, Bergvall’s backwards **‘WEL COME’** could be an acknowledgement of the outsider status of queer bodies in relation to both domestic and textual spaces, Acknowledging this difference through the backwards transcription might provide a starting point for a working through of queer difference and what that does from the ‘back’ side. Alternatively, one could see it as one writing on a door, through glass, from the ‘wrong’ side, the reader having been welcomed in and viewing the word from the inside out. The word both implicates the book as a material object to be entered, and also introduces a dialectic of inside/outside which continues throughout the text.

The book is a ‘home’ because it is a space within which words reside. It is designed as a ‘home’ for language. Yet Bergvall’s conscious design choices draw attention to the book as a constructed object rather than a neutral space. What kind of language is or isn’t ‘at home’ there is questioned through this, and the book, like the notion of ‘home’, becomes a politicized social space in which neither writer or reader are always at ease or ‘wel come’. Viewing things from the ‘back’ side is also something Ahmed proposes as part of a queer ‘reorientation’ of phenomenology. Ahmed argues for a renewed attention towards ‘the table’ in phenomenology, as although the table is a ‘central’ object in philosophical writing (both as the thing written ‘on’ and the thing written ‘about’) it is relegated to a background or landscape element of the writing:

Despite how the table matters it often disappears from view, as an object “from” which to think and toward which we direct our attention. By bringing what is “behind” to the front, we might queer phenomenology by creating a new angle, in part by reading for the angle of the writing, in the “what” that appears.<sup>97</sup>

Read in this way, Bergvall’s backwards ‘**WEL...COME**’ could signify a reorientation of writer and reader in relation to the book, language and the domestic space we enter onto at the beginning of the text. It functions both as a placing ‘behind’ of the reader, and a bringing to the ‘front’ of what is relegated to the background or landscape of the text and the architecture of the house. Through a formal reorientation of the book structure, and a conceptual reorientation of notions of home and belonging, *Éclat* treats both as territories, questioning their inherent political and cultural bias.

*Éclat* begins with a rigid structure. Thick black frames lie inside square pages, some with gaps or marks indicating entrances:

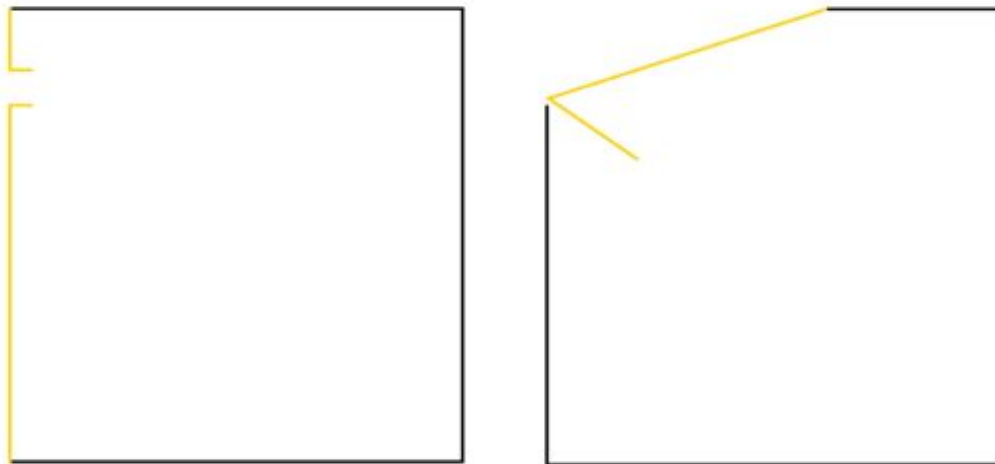


Figure 2. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, pages 5 and 12

However, in second image, the entrance is blocked. The shorter side of the

<sup>97</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 4

yellow shape seems to indicate a door, as one would on the floor plan of a building, but it opens up to a wall or obstruction, closed in on itself. Bergvall's geometry is skewed or queered through the book. On the second page pictured, it is no longer clear how to enter into the space, the entrance being interior to it and leading, effectively, nowhere. The complication of doors as entrances to the page and to the text questions, politically, the accessibility of social space and language. Through problematizing entrances, Bergvall also perhaps questions the privilege of the 'inside', of how 'wel...come' we are in the domestic or literary 'home' space of the book.

In addition to the visual/architectural doorframes in the book, doorways also exist as part of the textual 'guide' to the house:

**1. This is not a doorframe and that is THAT** (doorframe that)  
 divider: lines up intersections between room: and room: and corridor: to  
 join & split at each such:  
 : : : : : HEREand : : : : :  
 Pull in & widen up & widen up & pull in. And not there: and nor  
 Here and nor there. Conflict exchange. Amassed pressure stimuli.<sup>98</sup>

It seems here that the reader is placed at an 'intersection' indicated by the ': : : : : : : : HEREand : : : : :', the point at which matter (from one room to another) and meaning are 'pull[ed] in' and organized. Standing in a doorframe, one is pulled from one room to another, and is also not in either room but rather a between-space, 'nor / Here and nor there', of 'conflict exchange'. This example is typical of the way that Bergvall encourages us to dwell in the in-between spaces where the dialectic of inside/outside is undermined. Concepts of 'navigation' and 'orientation' are complicated through this, as Bergvall always seems to be urging us outwards or between. If, as Ahmed argues, 'sexual

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<sup>98</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 9



orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces',<sup>99</sup> then Bergvall's text orientates us queerly in that we are encouraged to be lost, enter trapdoors, and linger in the between-spaces and doorways of the text. Our experience of the house is thus uncomfortable, and like the 'floreign' guide, we are the outsider on the inside.

Georges Perec writes that 'the door breaks space in two, splits it, prevents osmosis, imposes a partition. On one side, me and my place, the private, the domestic [...] on the other side, other people, the world, the public, politics'.<sup>100</sup> In this formulation, where the door signifies the separation between the private/domestic and the public/political sphere, the text also serves as a half-open portal to both realms. Through the text, the personal/private is formulated as the political, and domestic space is made public. Bachelard's statement that 'the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open',<sup>101</sup> seems particularly resonant with Bergvall's work when thinking about systems of meaning through language in the text. Bachelard writes that 'language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through *meaning* it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up' (p. 222). Bergvall's poetics is also queered through this metaphor of the doorframe, in that meaning, through plurilingualism and innovative writing techniques, is never fixed but also 'between'. For example, by taking steps out of the

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<sup>99</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 2

<sup>100</sup> Georges Perec, *Species of Space and Other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 37

<sup>101</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 222

doorframe in the text, one is 'leeving the treshold clearing grount'.<sup>102</sup>

Here, 'leeving' implies both 'leaving' and 'levee', an artificial embankment built to stop the overflow of a river, a kind of preventative device. '[G]rout' could be seen as somewhere between 'ground', territory, and 'grout', a paste used to fill crevices and gaps. The unconventional spelling also privileges plosive sounds – 'treshold', 'grount' – and forces increased emphasis on certain syllables, for example the extended 'lee' of 'leeving', creating the effect of a strange or foreign accent, a certain deliberateness and perhaps difficulty of articulation, and the effect of multiple and open meanings. The ground is being left, but spaces are also being filled in and barriers put up to prevent overspill. It is at once an open and a protective gesture, simultaneously reaching out and closing in.

The metaphorical significance of the doorway is furthered by Bergvall's footnotes to these two pages. Lingering in the in-between, Bergvall warns, can be dangerous:

Note: That prolonged station at any such location brings about aphasia, loss of memory, nausea, inflammations, visionary spells, self-mutilations. That to use and modify\* such symptoms, their unrelenting repetition (is not the same is not the same) threatens nationalism\*

[....]

\* *History shows and and and*

[....]

*bearing in mind (the state of plastic) and in the knowledge that what seems and naturally & straight today will naturally appear and bent tomorrow. (pp. 9- 10)*

Here, the very physical and undesirable symptoms of disorientation at the site of 'conflict exchange' become tools with which to 'use and modify' existing systems. There's an obvious parallel to be made here with Judith Butler's

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<sup>102</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 10

theory of gender and repetition: '[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being'.<sup>103</sup> Butler questions ways of breaking out of this constructed framework, asking 'what kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?' (p. 44). In Bergvall's text, to 'use and modify' the symptoms of bodily and political disorientation might question the 'regulatory frame' of the socially constructed world to which we (whilst within the context of *Éclat*, at least) are exterior and unfamiliar.

Doorways and entrances within the text are the places where bodies are placed under the most pressure, under threat and in danger of collapse, disappearance and 'conflict exchange'. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed describes the pressure to conform to heterosexual life structure as a form of repetitive strain injury; we are 'pressed into lines'<sup>104</sup> of familial and social contract and inheritance. Ahmed argues that it is for this reason that bodies stay 'in line' and on the 'right' path. The more bodies become accustomed to repeating familiar actions in familiar spaces, the less able they are to deviate from these 'straight' lines or paths, where deviation would mean becoming 'lost', 'bent' and 'deviant'. Ahmed sees this as a self-perpetuating structure, perhaps akin to a well-trodden path in a dense forest:

Lines are both created by being followed and followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an

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<sup>103</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) p. 45

<sup>104</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 17

effect of this repetition. (p. 16)

Ahmed writes that in this situation, where a system is perpetuated by following well-trodden ancestral lines which then shape the subject through repeated performance of tradition, becoming lesbian is to create 'desire lines'. These lines deviate from official paths, breaching social order and denying the familial 'promise of return'. As such, 'becoming a lesbian still remains a difficult line to follow' (p. 20). Doorframes and entrances can be read as transient points or forks along the path of heterosexual life order: a point of departure which puts the body under pressure from desire and social contract, threatening a split, offering points of deviation. As Ahmed reminds us, whilst such departures can be joyous, they are also difficult deviations and pressure can accumulate as 'the point where bad feelings meet' (p. 75). By staying with moments of disorientation through the text, a 'subversive repetition' of straying or being lost occurs which undermines the ordered, geometrical, socially constructed space of the house. At first, this move effects an occupation, 'using' the house against the grain of tradition, and then works to reorder it within this disorientation, to 'modify' the house and create a temporary 'bent' environment out of it.

Following the metaphor of the book as a socially constructed and politically charged 'home' space, I want to examine use of space in Bergvall's book as comparable to Bachelard's 'centrality' of the house. The spatial arrangement of language on the page in *Éclat* can be read as a spatial representation of hegemonic (or central) and liminal subject positions within domestic space. Ahmed writes that 'the normalization of heterosexuality as an

orientation toward “the other sex” can be redescribed in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct and honest’ (p. 71). Moving from the doorway to the living room of the house, the unease we find there can be seen as a comment on ‘the ease with which heterosexual bodies can inhabit public space’ (p. 101), and the regulatory nature of these spaces upon bodies:

THIS. Is a living room. A front room. Owdooyoodoo. Owdooyoodoo. To cross into a rm of ths kind that we may carry & conduct ourselves as if originating from resolved gender and normal art. Accurate, precise, seamlessly, well-adjusted. *You’ve crossed into the*. High ceiling open fire. Name the objects arranged and negotiated.<sup>105</sup>

The move from the in-between of the doorframe to the highly socially regulated space of the living or ‘front’ room brings with it an awkwardness of order and proper social conduct. We are aware of ‘ourselves’ as outsiders; we must ‘conduct ourselves *as if* originating from resolved gender and normal art’, implying that we know we don’t. This is comparable to Ahmed’s ‘normalization’, the central positioning of this part of the text and the fairly conventional layout implying the pressure of clarity of communication and exchange in literature and public life. The phonetic spelling (‘owdooyoodoo’) implies, like ‘treshhold’ and ‘grount’, a deliberateness or carefulness of articulation stemming from an accented or unfamiliar entry to language. The stilted dialogue which follows also implies the regulatory force of social conduct: ‘Ndeed. / Biscuit. / Thankyou ta’ (p. 13). The body in this instance is carefully contained, monosyllabic, ordered and moulded into a shape which

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<sup>105</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 13

does not quite fit. Rituals of the house are queered or misinterpreted, domestication becoming 'domastication', a chewing up or mangling of domestic space rather than an adherence to it.

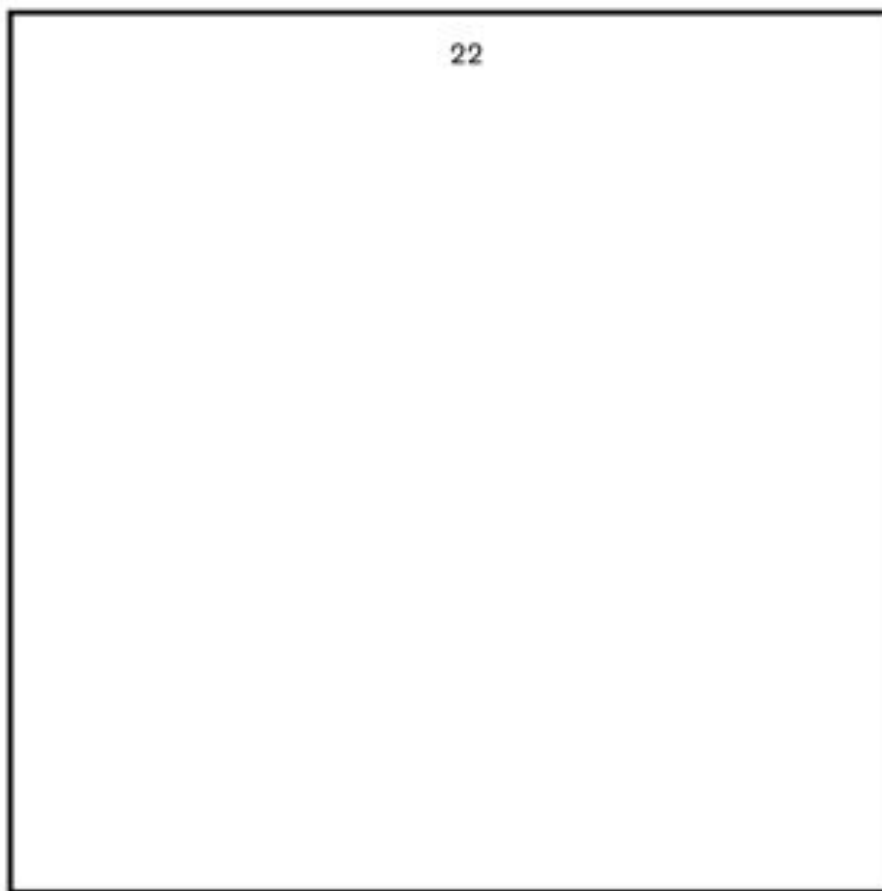
Ahmed writes that

The lesbian body does not extend the shape of this world, as a world organized around the form of the homosexual couple. Inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions.<sup>106</sup>

I would argue that the form of *Éclat* moves from the position of an outsider inhabiting the 'skin of the social', to a subversive occupation of this skin – the house – by a body that doesn't fit, and finally towards a queer and alternate architecture where 'the world acquires a new shape', albeit temporarily. The 'skin of the social' here also applies to the 'skin' or pages of the book, queered through innovative spatial and linguistic practices upon it. Whilst, as I will discuss, Bergvall makes use of the borders and margins of the text to highlight liminal subject positions, the 'main' space of the page is often left largely or entirely blank, or treated as a palimpsestic chorus of half-erased voices. Page 22 of the text (see fig. 3) illustrates the privilege of 'easy' communication through white space, which can be read as a visual form of silence. The thick black frame implies the boundaries of 'official' space, the privileged space of communication. The barely legible note at the bottom, '(it wasn't easy at first then it became quite easy then easier then really easy...then suddenly it wasn't easy, not easy at all, all over again)' further emphasizes this. Its visual insignificance on the page and its appearance in parentheses reinforce the statement, which, through its repetitions, creates a

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<sup>106</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 21



(it wasn't easy at first then it became quite easy then easier then really easy, real easy, no probs, easy peasy, could do it in my sleep, then suddenly it wasn't easy, not easy at all, not at all easy, all o- er again.)

Figure 3. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat* p. 22

linguistic cycle mirroring the historic difficulty and struggle to communicate which is not overcome in a single step of reversal. Like the act of looking and feeling 'backwards' which Love discusses, and which I analyze in relation to queer experimental writing in Chapter One, one could see Bergvall's practice as a search for tools of communication which at once attempt to remember and forget this silence of queer history. In this instance, Bergvall achieves this by demonstrating the privileged and politically biased space of the page which must be tackled and overcome in order to write alternate histories and perspectives upon it.

Bergvall's design choices – her utilization of margin or border space, allowing many pages to be almost or completely 'blank' – also recall Anzaldúa's insistence of the positive possibilities of the borderland, the in-between space. If 'homo' can be read as also 'homeless' (and this is something Ahmed raises also, stating that '[i]f homes are queer, they are also diasporic' (p. 176), the home being so attached to the pattern of heterosexual life in terms of its structure and uses) then options for queer subjects are limited to adaptation or resistance from a border space. Just as Anzaldúa advocates living creatively in the borderland, in '*una cultura mezista*', Bergvall's border-texts and silent 'main' spaces can be read as political statements about one's cultural location and viewpoint. The liberating possibilities of being outside of domesticity, the canon, or any other 'official space' are emphasized. The use of border space also makes evident the regulation of speech and the censorship of bodies, through drawing attention to silence and liminality in relation to queer speech acts.



Bergvall's use of silence and blank space can also be read as an acknowledgement of the difficulty and pain of the 'empty archive' of queer history as described by Traub. In Chapter One I outline textual tactics of remembering and forgetting as ways of dealing with the psychological pain and oppression present within queer history. Bergvall's fluctuation between silence and communication can similarly be read as a complex tension between remembering and forgetting, translated into a spatial practice. Silence is a way of forgetting, refusing to recall in language, and silence is also a way of being forgotten through refusing a voice. However, silence is also conspicuous when translated into a visual absence on the page. The juxtaposition of 'empty' and 'full' pages make the empty pages 'speak' and make a reader question their emptiness. So, silence here can be seen as a way of remembering the past, of acknowledging years of forced queer silence through oppression, untold stories, and 'empty archives'.<sup>107</sup>

This theme of silence and the struggle to speak is revisited spatially through the text several times. In the latter half of the text, many pages are blank or almost blank, seemingly erased. These blank pages are followed by pages in which sections of the text are pale, grey, merging into the white space, partial exclamations and fragments of communication:



Figure 4. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, detail from p. 44

<sup>107</sup> Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, p. 450

The palimpsestic overlaying, and paleness of the text here, indicates both struggle and excess in communication. The space in which language is allowed to live becomes a fraught battleground, and, when represented as such, this blank framed space is comparable to the uncomfortable socially regulated domesticity of the house.

Whilst these visual instances of erasure and failure to communicate might point to the difficulty of queer speech and visibility, there's also a more playful and reflective form of 'domastication' at work in the text. Bergvall plays with repetition and difference in a way that demonstrates what Ahmed describes as the 'RSI' effect of social heterosexuality, which shapes the body and guides desire through the accumulation of repeated behaviours and routines. On page 28 of the text, the phrase 'that's how we like you' is repeated down one side, as a pale grey 'background' to the stuttering and half erased text printed 'atop' (see fig. 5). This could be seen as a form of wallpaper, a repeated pattern of domestic life designed to disappear or blend in. Perec writes that the act of dwelling is in part an act of forgetting about walls: 'I put a picture up on a wall. Then I forget there is a wall'.<sup>108</sup> As such, familiar domestic arrangements become a form of naturalized landscape. This could be seen as a form of wallpaper, a repeated pattern of domestic life designed to disappear or blend in. As such, familiar domestic arrangements become a form of naturalized landscape. Bergvall draws our attention to what is 'behind' domesticity, the text, and language. Whilst the words fade into the

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<sup>108</sup> Perec, *Species of Space*, p. 39



background like Perec's walls, they also indicate the ways in which we are controlled, guided and 'pressed into lines' by domestic arrangements. Ahmed writes that

[f]urniture involves technologies of convention, producing arrangements as an arrangement of things: in the presumption that life should be organized in certain ways....Over and over again we see the repetition of this form, which 'invites' one to inhabit spaces by following these lines.<sup>109</sup>

Bergvall's repetition ad nauseum of the phrase 'that's how we like you' performs this act of inherited normative gender and heterosexuality, indicating both the role of repeated acts and the role of inheritance in shaping the self. As Bergvall writes elsewhere in the text, 'ze clothes make ze monk'.<sup>110</sup> our social situation defines our identity by directing us to act and behave in certain ways, not the other way around. Such foregrounding could be seen as a queering of domestic space, a 'queer furnishing' of the home. Ahmed writes that '[a] queer furnishing might be about making what is in the background, what is behind us, more available as "things" to do "things" with'.<sup>111</sup> By drawing attention to naturalized elements of domestic architecture (queering them by indicating how they can be changed as well as what they "do") Bergvall dissociates us from the familiarity of the home space and begins to queer architecture of both the house and the book. Bergvall uses blank space both as an unbecoming or forgetting of self through silence and a tribute to the 'empty archive' of queer history. Here, she also queers the book space through a 'forgetting' of established forms. Much as Bellamy an Child queer

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<sup>109</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 168

<sup>110</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 24

<sup>111</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 168

the text through ‘forgetting’ genre and narrative, Bergvall skews shape and forgets the limits of the written text in order to make ‘room’ for the queer body.

Silence and blank space within the text can also be seen as a testament to the cultural invisibility of the lesbian subject. Elizabeth Grosz writes that ‘lesbian desire and sexual relations between women’ is ‘the area which still remains the great domain of the untheorized and the inarticulate’,<sup>112</sup> attributing this inarticulacy to a lack of language and power. Bergvall’s use of silence and emptiness can be seen as a testament to this inarticulacy. Furthermore, it can be read as a resistance to articulation, to the making visible of the lesbian body, for fear of what Ahmed describes as the ‘straightening devices’ of hegemony upon queer bodies. Ahmed writes that historically, lesbian desire has either been erased or discounted by an association with ‘sameness’ and sisterhood, making sameness rather than desire the defining feature of lesbianism.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, she posits that psychoanalysis’ insistence on the congenital masculinity of the lesbian, and the social understandings of the butch/femme couple, are ways of is ‘bringing queer desire back into line’ by arranging it in a way that mimics the binary opposition of the heterosexual couple (p. 71). Bergvall’s empty space could be seen in part as a refusal to be straightened by being visible.

Silence and the refusal to speak can also be read as radically political acts of opposition, as part of what Halberstam describes as ‘an anti-social,

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<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995) p. 219

<sup>113</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 96

negative and anti-relational theory of sexuality'<sup>114</sup> currently occurring in queer academic studies. Drawing heavily on Leo Bersani's theory of sex as 'self-shattering' (p. 140), Halberstam is concerned particularly with what she terms 'radical passivity': resisting hegemony by refusing to *be*, through acts of 'unbecoming'. Halberstam posits passivity, unbecoming and negativity as powerful features of queer politics. In the context of a discussion of Yoko Ono's performance artwork *Cut Piece*,<sup>115</sup> Halberstam states that '[t]he anti-social dictates an unbecoming, a cleaving to that which seems to shame or annihilate; and a radical passivity allows for the inhabiting of femininity with a difference' (p. 151). Ono's work can be viewed as an act of radical passivity which comments on the destructive power of the dual forces of capitalism and patriarchy. In *Cut Piece*, this leads to an undoing of self, performatively enacted through deliberate and controlled passivity in the context of performance. Similarly, Bergvall's visual enactment of silence is a disorientating instance of radical passivity which forces a reader into an increased awareness of *what* is not being said, and *who* is not saying it. Whilst such a tool might be viewed by some as a purely negative act (after all, there's a fine line between performative silence and 'everyday' silence when the silent party is already marginalized on an 'everyday' basis) it is its very negativity which prompts both thought and action on the part of the reader. So, as well as the silence representing a refusal to be straightened, it can also

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<sup>114</sup> Halberstam, 'The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies', p. 140

<sup>115</sup> Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, first performed in 1964, is a happening whereby audience members are invited to use scissors to cut pieces of clothing off Ono, who sits passively on the gallery floor. For documentation of iterations of this performance to date, see Kevin Concannon, 'Yoko Ono's CUT PIECE: From Text to Performance and Back Again', *PAJ – A Journal of Performance and Art* 90 (2008) pp. 81-93

be read as a radical unbecoming of self through a refusal to *be* at all.

Other elements in the text also point to this problem of representation. Bergvall's references to 'Uncle Gertrude', who 'doesn't know her insides from her out'<sup>116</sup> can be read as an acknowledgement of the 'straightening devices' placed upon 'deviant' bodies, Gertrude Stein's body being (re) read as male due to a disorientating schism between mind and body.<sup>117</sup> The reference to 'cow' on the same page also recalls the social coding of queer desire, 'cow' in the context of Stein's work being widely understood as a metaphor or code for orgasm. The retort '[n]ot cows, darling, sisters, they're sisters' (p. 14) can also be seen as a reference to the first type of 'straightening device' outlined in Ahmed's text: the relegation of same sex desire to sameness and kinship, thus de-eroticising the lesbian couple. Later references in the text, 'was a sister a sister', 'twins not twins', 'whose Narcissus' and '[a] sister was not a mister' all serve to negotiate the space between the two straightening devices imposed on the lesbian relationship. Sameness and opposites, sisters and misters. Bergvall refuses both, denying sisterhood and resisting the masculinity of the (not) 'sister'.

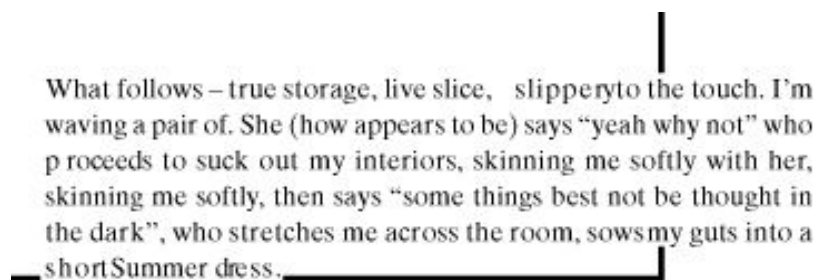
Bergvall writes of 'the florenigner her accentuated gait across the rooms, whose forbearance is a wonder to stabilize, whose skirting habits carry much

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<sup>116</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 14

<sup>117</sup> Stein herself supported the idea of herself as 'masculine' in the context of Otto Weininger's work on the connection between the 'masculine female' and female genius (see Leon Katz, 'Weininger and The Making of Americans' in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1. (1978), pp. 8-26). Whilst some have read this as a betrayal of womanhood and feminist principles, the act could feasibly be reread as an instance of queer refusal. Halberstam writes that 'Stein was not troubled by the anti-feminism or anti-semitism of Weininger, on the contrary, she found it to be a relief. And Stein could easily be folded into the apolitical anti-social agenda of Edelman and Bersani with her refusal to make sense and to mean in any conventionally clichéd ways' (Halberstam, 'The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies', pp.144-145).

relevance by way of occupancy' (p. 31). In the context of the book, 'skirting habits' carries two interrelated meanings: one of gender, a dress code or visual signal of femininity, and one of spatial and political positioning on the outskirts. There is 'something / about the / o u t s i d e' (p. 31) as a spatial and political concern threaded through the book. Queer desire can be seen as 'skirting' or bordering 'official' space, bursting out from the margins and written in such a way that the styles and modes of expression contrast sharply:



What follows – true storage, live slice, slippery to the touch. I'm waving a pair of. She (how appears to be) says “yeah why not” who proceeds to suck out my interiors, skinning me softly with her, skinning me softly, then says “some things best not be thought in the dark”, who stretches me across the room, sows my guts into a short Summer dress.

Figure 6. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, detail from p. 13

The continuous sentence here indicates a rushing forth of desire, the breaking of an (enforced) silence, in opposition to the staccato rhythms of 'domestic' exchange elsewhere on the page: 'thankyou ta'. Whilst I would argue that Bergvall's design choices in the text emphasize the right to a voice, there's also an element of freedom associated with skirting the borders of spaces. The positive power of the margins as a subcultural force is demonstrated through the text, and we as readers become a part of the margins. Bergvall provides a reader with a map of their positioning in relation to the text and the house:



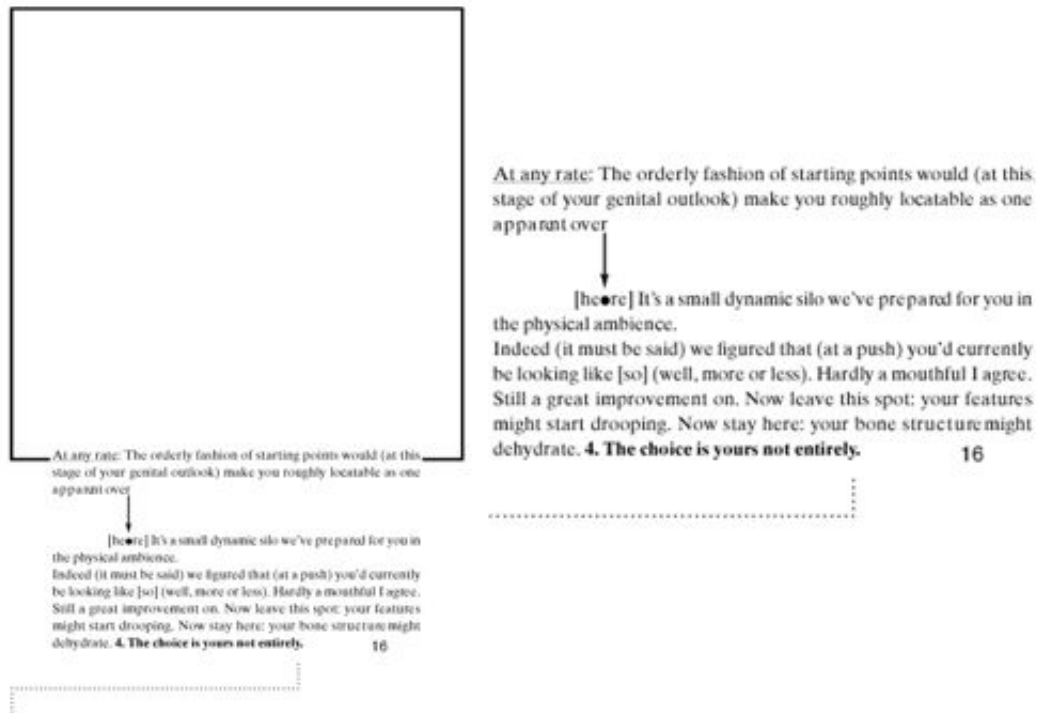


Figure 7. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 16, with enlarged detail.

This starting position as dictated by sexuality or 'genital outlook', is a 'silo' (an underground chamber) outside of the bordered-in 'main' space of the page. Like the doorway, it's a risky position which carries with it symptoms of bodily disorder and disintegration. This positioning suggests the powerful impact of culture upon bodies. Normative imprints of gender, sexuality, citizenship and national identity resulting in the impression of a whole and coherent readable body which 'we' as an imagined collective of readers are outside of. Bergvall asks: 'wonder about the long-term social arrangements of our reconstructed flesh?' (p. 14). Queerness in *Éclat* functions not only to highlight the importance of non-normative identities but to call into question the constructed nature of *all* notions of fixed identity. Events of the margins disrupt the stability of the 'central' text. As the reader is being directed through graphics from their initial 'genital outlook' around the edges of bordered pages, the allegedly

stable objects in the central and official space of the page undergo a transformative reworking:

you're thinking about a  
 small object something  
 stable something stable  
 and precise something  
 stable precise and accurate  
 something stable precise  
 accurate and unchanging  
 and pleasing must be  
 pleasing come to think of it  
 that might make it unstable  
 unstable and imprecise and  
 changing OK lets say its  
 got to be a small pleasing  
 object a small pleasing  
 easily identifiable object  
 come to think of it whats an  
 easily identifiable object  
**a familiar object a usable**  
**object (question) but then**  
 whats familiar to you might  
 not be familiar to me and  
 whats usable to her might  
 not be usable to her and  
 what about pleasing just  
 think about that

Figure 8. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, detail from p. 20

This serves as an example-in-practice of queer phenomenology in that ‘the place from which one sees’ (in this case, the margins) affects the material value attached to objects and space. This act is facilitated through a writing practice which utilizes repetition in a similar manner to Butler’s thesis on gender: a ‘subversive repetition’ which enables a transformative perception of the object in question.

Such repetitions can also be read as acts of forgetting. Stein, an obvious

influence on *Éclat* (as both an experimental writer and a queer cultural heirloom) states that when she wrote ‘a rose is a rose is a rose’, she made the rose new through paratactic repetition: ‘the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years’.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, by negotiating the familiar object through repetitions with variations, Bergvall destabilizes it and makes it new for the reader. Repetitions, when used in this way, can function as an aid to forgetting rather than an aid to remembering. They allow the ‘familiar objects’ within the space of the text to be renewed through a forgetting of context and a destabilization of identity. Through repetition, Bergvall re-aligns the space to a queer perspective, forgetting the stability and use value of the ‘familiar’ in order to imagine the space anew.

Through this renewal, Bergvall moves the margins progressively into a central position, the obviousness of ‘difference’ in subculture effecting a change in the perception of *all* space, objects and culture. The margins – through being a place in which the binaries of male/female, tenderness/violence, desire/disgust and so on are broken down and reworked – bleed into the centre in order to undermine the assumed ‘naturalness’ of their construction and the barriers which keep them polarized. What Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the ‘deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption’,<sup>119</sup> upon which the social and spatial arrangement of the house and family unit are historically built, is challenged. This move from margin to centre – which I have described in this text as being the trajectory from outsider to occupation

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<sup>118</sup> quoted in Marjorie Perloff, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Modernism: The ‘New’ Poetics* (London: Blackwell, 2002) p. 53

<sup>119</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 68

to the creation of a queer architectural framework – occurs slowly and hesitantly through the book. The marginal moves inward and towards an ‘intimate immensity’ of sexuality within the queered spaces of book and house.

In phenomenological theory, intimacy and familiarity with a space leads to an extension of being. Ahmed notes that ‘[l]oving one’s home is not about being fixed into a place, but rather it is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one’s body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as *overflowing* and *flowing over*’.<sup>120</sup> Bachelard writes of this bodily extension as a kind of peace associated with the reconciliation of man and his space, facilitated by a position of repose and aloneness in this space: ‘the great stream of simple humility that is in the silent room flows into ourselves. The intimacy of the room becomes our intimacy’.<sup>121</sup> In Bachelard’s formulation, such ‘intimate immensity’ of dwelling signals a form of cosmological transcendence where man is so ‘at home’ and at one with his space that his being is at once validated and obliterated through its harmony with and resulting osmosis into its surrounding space. No such cosmological transcendence occurs within *Éclat*. However, I have (mis)appropriated the term ‘intimate immensity’ from Bachelard in order to demonstrate the visceral relationship between self and space that occurs within the text. Having examined how elements of the traditional social space of ‘home’ have been systematically questioned, occupied, broken down and undermined from the

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<sup>120</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 11

<sup>121</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 226

margins, I would now like to look closely at the last few pages of *Éclat*. It is here that Bergvall constructs a necessarily temporary and yet politically powerful form of queer architecture, using moments of ‘disorientation’ (what Ahmed labels in phenomenological theory as ‘queer moments’) to her advantage. This facilitates an ‘intimate immensity’ of the sexual body within this provisional space. I wish to argue that such moments of intimate immensity are forms of subcultural queer insurgency which enact a critique and destabilization of hegemonic spaces.

Whilst earlier parts of the book deal with outsider status and occupation of a domestic space by this outsider, the text and the bodies within the space become more at ease as the book progresses. The powerfully political space of the margins begins to occupy the central space and change or ‘morph’ it to its advantage. The body as (dis)orientated by the ‘floreign’ narrator becomes more confident with the solidity of space: ‘This is nice. *You’re standing on the landing* and it isn’t giving way under your feet’.<sup>122</sup> This solidity, achieved through the renegotiation of ‘domastic’ objects and the foregrounding of subjectivity and spatial positioning as value-givers to material goods, leads to a performance of territory-marking and bodily extension, an act of ‘intimate immensity’:

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<sup>122</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 43

This insignificant detail fills you with such a sense of embossment it is so: elating so: unbelievable so: unbelievable that you exclaim

I!be!could!happy!here! and quickly lift up your and pull down your and squat and press out your happening vaginals, your instinctual drive, your cultural reticence, your dutiful intelligence, your cautious elaborations, your impeccable taste, in shots of urine all over the surface of this very perfect spot. (p. 43)

A territorial politics is at work in this act of bodily extension. Rather than being represented as part of a vessel for occupation or the facilitator of male sexual performance, female genitalia are used here as part of a political occupation of social space, a tool to facilitate visibility and ownership, and in this sense it is a feminist act. It can also be read as a queer act, in that it deviates from heteronormative genital representation and usage.

What follows this territory-marking is a visual queering of the architecture of book and house (see fig. 9). The frame around the page is split and skewed, defying the regular geometry of both room and page. This act confuses the boundary between inside and outside, moving corners to the centre, and defies Bachelard's theory that 'the corner is a haven that ensures one of the things we prize most highly – immobility'.<sup>123</sup> In Bergvall's text, geography is mutable and geometry is queered: 'what appears naturally & straight today will naturally appear and bent tomorrow',<sup>124</sup> we are told at the beginning of the book. At this point in the text, with corners and margins moving in towards the centre, it appears that we have reached 'tomorrow'. The occupation of space by queer bodies leads to an increased malleability of

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<sup>123</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 137

<sup>124</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 10

that space and to the (de)formation of 'bent' architectures. Ahmed states that 'phenomenology helps us to consider how sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space'.<sup>125</sup> Bergvall's text, through a visual queering (that is, a coming out of alignment) of the book space, moves from a state of being inhabited, to inhabiting, and beyond to a reorientation which

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<sup>125</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 67

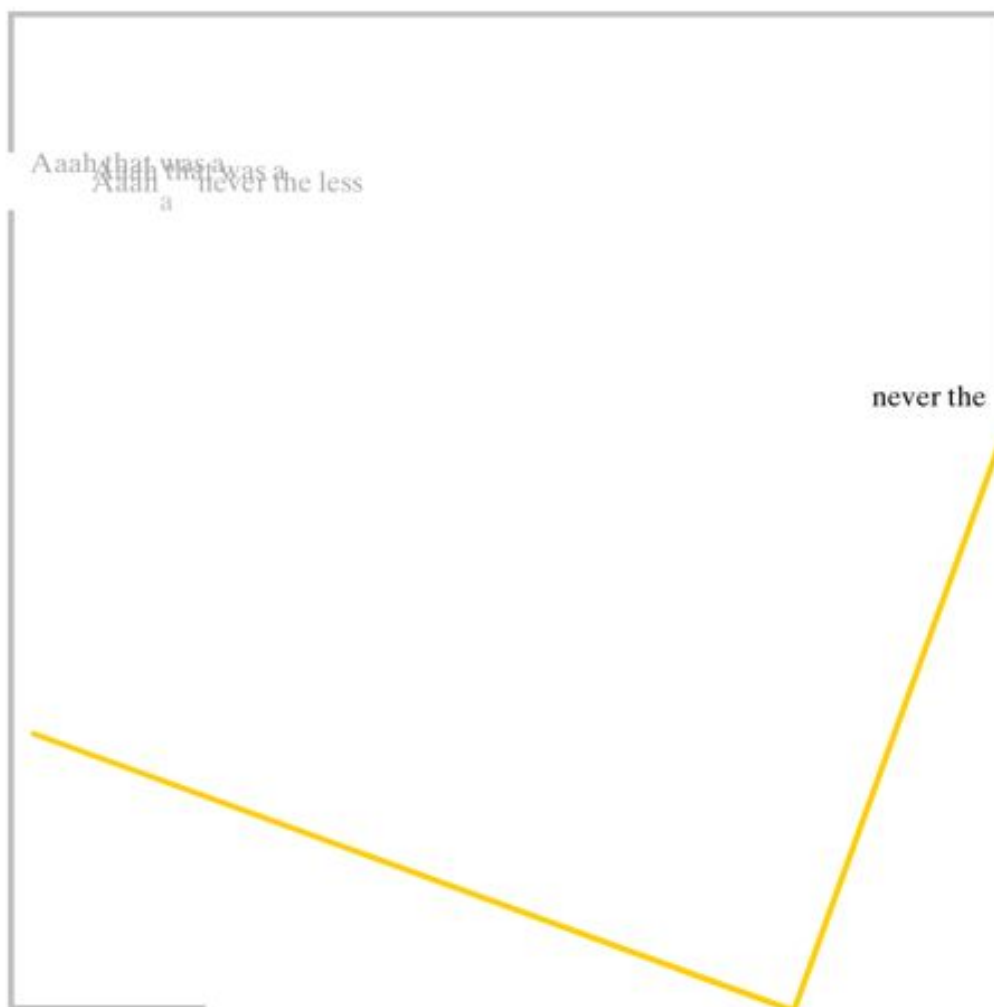


Figure 9. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 44



results in a reshaping of space as ‘bent’. As Bergvall writes, ‘to fit oneself perfectly quite is one thing but to deploy insides out one’s own extensiveness now that’s now that’s’.<sup>126</sup> Bodies, failing to fit into the ‘skin of the social’ which does not extend to fit their form, must expand themselves outward to bend this mould with a sexuality that requires a different kind of shape.

This act of territorial possession and the resulting bend in architectural structure results in the introduction of a new room to the text, ‘the one marked surg.r’, a merging of ‘sugar’ (sweetness, titillation), ‘surge’ (a force), and ‘surgeon’ (to operate and change). This room is the culmination of Bergvall’s reworking of the house, the exposition of her temporary queer architecture. ‘Its vastness s...ises you, takes you aback. Its ornate decoration. Red deep carpets seem much at odds with the .est of the house’ (p. 48). The ‘ornate decoration’ of the room implies pleasure, excess and comfort, in contrast with the uncomfortable and stilted domesticity of the living room earlier in the text, and the room’s ‘vastness’ resonates with the act of ‘deploy[ing] insides out’ in ‘extensiveness’ of the body into space. This corporeal immensity is coupled with the intimacy of queer sexuality, itself expansive and unfixed. A woman (questionably – ‘was a she a she’ (p. 48)) morphs the architecture of the room: ‘[s]eems to be talking takes up more room...the sofa’s popping out are the walls extruding the air seems hotter, tighter’ (p. 49). Bodies also expand and appear fluid within this room: ‘[c]oming out fast, she’s conversing face down across a table her legs pushing a handful of her own up her indescribably big, her space-surround ambient organum’ (p. 48). ‘Outsider’

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<sup>126</sup> Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 45

bodies have moved the margins into the centre, and the consequent shift in spatial arrangements results in a sexually permissive site of queer sexual pleasure. The form of the writing also changes within this space, becoming an expansive poetics saturated with language. The sexual encounter is a spiritual (and arguably blasphemous) passage, full of repetitions and shifts, a textual *jouissance*:

Marymary slitless I discharge charge banged across the palastered all  
over the banged across the throb...I say blast what splendid cunts Mary  
saint! never let it be never let it be said are inward inwarded so bless me  
bless me Mary pleine de grace for to extend inout one's outsides out.  
(p. 49)

This page can be read as a kind of orgasmic 'homecoming', the moment at which bodies and the space surrounding them are central and uncensored, the voice continuous and uninterrupted, the repetitions centring the focus to the point of desire and functioning as a kind of metaphorical scaffolding for the language of textual pleasure.

However, this architecture of queer sexual pleasure is necessarily temporary. On the pages that follow there is a 'shlurp' as 'skin / pops / back / to its / curr / ent / conv / entio / nal / dime / nsio / ns' (p. 53). Coming full circle on this journey of disorientation and reorientation, the body emerges back into conventional space of text and home and is reformed accordingly. The final page of the text functions as a reflection on the critical necessity of this journey. 'A thinker once said girls make a gorgeous margin...crmonies of sweat 'n .isibility' (p. 55), Bergvall writes, highlighting the need for a feminist and queer writing practice which might use 'adjectival distentions pooled into spectacles recombinaant' (p. 55) to create a 'morphing' and permissive queer

space. This final part of the text questions, in Ahmed's words, 'the ease with which heterosexual bodies can inhabit public spaces', and the way in which these spaces shape bodies through 'behavioural accumulation'.<sup>127</sup>

The temporary nature of the architecture Bergvall creates through the text is comparable to the queer movement itself. Jagose writes that queer theory's 'definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics',<sup>128</sup> in that 'queer' is an umbrella term incorporating any non-normative instance of gender and sexuality, and that in its inclusiveness and mobility it functions as 'a negotiation of the very concept of identity itself' (p. 130). Similarly, in Bergvall's creation of queer space, concepts of sexuality, occupation and 'home' are not simply inverted or reclaimed, but, rather, opened up so that the binaries of gender, sexuality, insider/outsider and foreigner/citizen are bled into each other, resulting in a disorientating series of 'queer moments' in which the phenomenology of queer sexuality is imagined and explored. In an interview I conducted with Bergvall for *How2* journal, I ask her why she writes, and she answers:

Initially, I wrote because I needed to appear, to find a way of appearing in the world. It was a very private basis. It was to give myself a place that I thought I could be in charge of, and that could somehow solidify me a bit. Out of that were built various layers of identity, of interests, of experience. The core of it was very much a question to myself: How do you exist? That's still very much there, how do I exist and how do *we* exist, collectively? What separates us?<sup>129</sup>

There's a concept of spatiality at work within this statement, which is also

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<sup>127</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 101

<sup>128</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p. 1

<sup>129</sup> Sophie Robinson, 'Caroline Bergvall in Conversation with Sophie Robinson', *How2* Vol. 3 Issue 3 (2009) <[http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol\\_3\\_no\\_3/bergvall/bergvall-robinson-interview.html](http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_3/bergvall/bergvall-robinson-interview.html)> [accessed 20th December 2011] (para. 22 of 24)

visible in *Éclat*: a praxis of identity formation in relation to both social and artistic modes of existence and visibility. Through her practice, Bergvall carves out this exploratory space with which to experiment with and question the politicized body in its stance towards the world, building temporary and imaginative queer architectures, shifting boundaries and thus allowing for new possibilities of poetics within temporary and formally innovative 'homes'.

iii. **SCULPTING: QUEER IMMERSIVE SPACE IN KARI EDWARDS' *IDUNA***

kari edwards' *iduna* is a complex and saturated text. edwards' use of graphics, typography and layering, as well as the sheer *amount* of language the text contains, means that each page must be approached and apprehended as a visual as well as a textual object. At the same time, the continuity, use of repetitions and 'cycles' of language through the text mean that each page must be considered in relation to the others. The combination of these factors makes *iduna* a very difficult book to critically dissect in a traditional way; any reference to an individual poem feels like a decontextualisation or 'flattening' of a dynamic and multidimensional object. The entire book, including the title page, acknowledgements, contents page and bibliography (those spaces usually reserved for 'institutional or 'administrative' information) has a series of four-letter words running across the top and bottom of the page. Each page also has graphic elements, thin grey lines seeming to form half- letters and punctuation, as well as suggesting mathematical symbols, as 'background' or 'behind' of the text. Some pages have further graphic detail and the density and scale of these elements is variable, giving one the sense of three- dimensional space, of a deep background stretching back behind the 'main' text of each page. Marcus Civin, in his recollections of time spent with edwards, notes that edwards trained as a sculptor before she came to writing, and that this visual, three- dimensional practice stayed with her in the way that she worked with

language: '[i]n writing, kari pursued an immersive, sculptural space'.<sup>130</sup> The illusion of three- dimensional space and depth in edwards' work is indeed suggestive of a visual arts practice. edwards was an admirer of the work of artist Ree Morton, and drew inspiration from both her work and her journals (p. 118). As a way of examining edwards' use of space in *iduna*, I would like to look at the book alongside three of Morton's installation pieces, spanning the majority of her short but prolific career in the 1970s. Through looking at these three pieces alongside *iduna*, I wish to demonstrate edwards' use of spatiality as a political tool which questions and deconstructs the heterosexuality and polarized gender constructions of heterosexual social and domestic space. Furthermore, I wish to posit that by transforming *iduna* into 'an immersive, sculptural space' at the level of book, page, and word, edwards suggests writing techniques which might explode these spaces by adding 'depth' to the seamless surface of written language. In doing this, edwards exposes what is behind or beneath the work, what hegemonic power structures are in place in order for the words to appear. I will argue that edwards constructs the text as a faulty 'mirror' which fragments and distorts established forms, and in doing this creates forms of queer spatiality. This queer space foregrounds the queer subject at the same time as critiquing hegemonic, heteronormative forms of space and language use which keep the queer body oppressed.

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<sup>130</sup> Marcus Civin, 'Verbing', *kari edwards: NO GENDER*, ed. Julian T. Brolaski, erika kaufman, E. Tracy Grinnell (New York: Belladonna Books/Litmus Press, 2009) pp. 117-123 (p. 118)

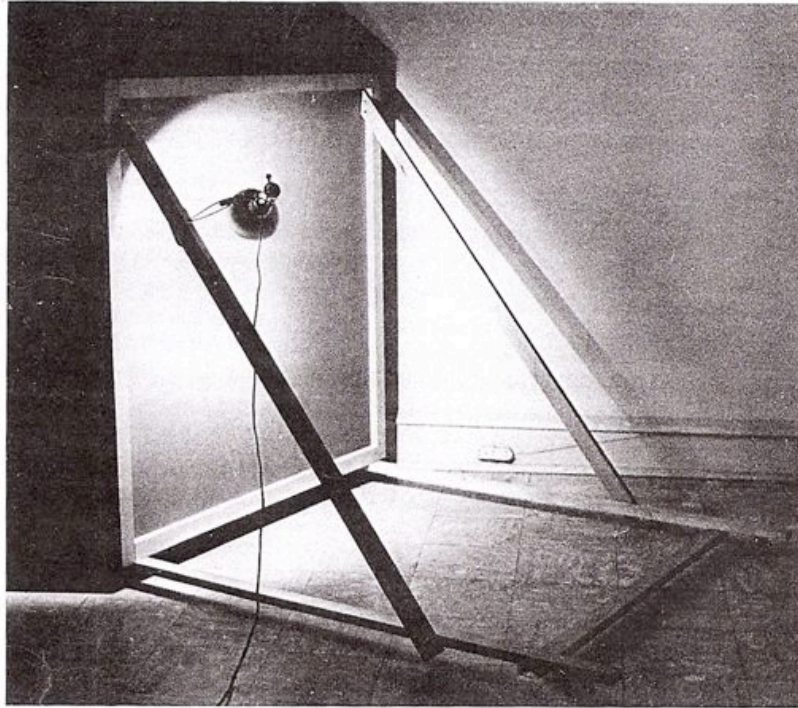


Figure 10. Ree Morton, *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Piece*, 1970

*The 2nd Light Piece*, one of Morton's early works, was made during the period in which she was experimenting with the imitation and deconstruction of traditional forms.<sup>131</sup> The piece is a masonite sheet on a mobile wooden frame with castors. The light clipped onto the structure illuminates the back of the masonite, exposing the supporting structure and leaving the front part (usually the part which would depict or show the art) in darkness. The spotlight recalls the overhead light fixtures used to illuminate the Old Master paintings (p. 13), and yet by illuminating the 'wrong' side of the piece Morton provokes a viewer to question what is 'behind' the production of art, and what 'supports' traditional forms of art production. The piece also plays with concepts of openness and enclosure; as Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen

<sup>131</sup> Ree Morton, *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971-1977* (New York: The New Museum, 1980) p. 7

Thomas write, '[i]ts open structure identifies edges, or the boundaries defined by the wooden slats, suggesting, without actually making, a framework' (p. 12-13). By suggesting enclosure within an open or empty structure, Morton highlights the framework or container of art, the material dimensions of its composition. The orientation of the piece, the illumination of the 'wrong' side and the partial framework of enclosure all suggest an opening up of the artwork into larger open spaces, thinking beyond established form and material constraint: an opening- out of ideas.

edwards' approach to the book and the page is superficially at odds with Bergvall's. Whilst *Éclat* has a very slick, minimalist and typographically sophisticated aesthetic, *iduna*'s messiness, saturated with blurred and distorted text and handmade scribbles, borders on anti-aesthetics. However, both books use textual aesthetics in very different ways to show us the wrong or back side of language. Just as Olsen's work investigates the 'wrong' side of the page, and just as Bergvall's piece shows the 'back side' of language through tracing the word 'WEL COME' backwards, edwards' text uses graphic elements and palimpsests of language in order to reveal what is 'behind' the text. Similarly, Morton's installation shows us the reverse side of the artwork, and edwards' treatment of the book can be seen to shine a metaphorical light *through* the flat page to reveal a three-dimensional textual space teeming with histories, codes and voices.

The words repeated throughout the book, in large pale letters behind the smaller and more regulated prose and verse ('ud apo geneus qwqs [sic] reudhs ud apo ruderalus...') are revealed at the end of the book to be the



etymological root words of Gertrude Stein's poem 'A Box', from *Tender Buttons*. This is also the 'back' side of language in that it appears at the 'back' of the text and that it is a tracing 'back' of words to their etymological roots. Before looking at what this reference to Stein means in *iduna*, I want to briefly address the issues of space, gender and sexuality in Stein's poem.

#### A Box

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and is it disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again.<sup>132</sup>

The word 'box' can be read as a reference to the vagina. Stein's allusive writing style automatically renders the work as a subjective stance towards the objects, rooms and food in the text, and in the context of the 'box', a female stance towards this 'object' can be read as a queer stance. This queer perspective is reinforced by the reference to cattle, often read in Stein's work as 'code' for the female orgasm. The first sentence can be read as setting up two opposing positions, perhaps one of openness (kindness) and one of closing or hemming in (rudeness, selection). '[O]ut of an eye comes research' suggests a phenomenological approach to the world, which is a world unfolding from the subjective perspective, an opening up of the world before one. The following phrase, 'out of selection comes painful cattle', suggests a hemming in or even butchering of queer sexuality, the 'cattle' associated with orgasm becoming 'painful'. 'A Box' would thus seem on the one hand to allude to female and queer sexuality, and on the other to refer to the containment of

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<sup>132</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 4

the self, the controller of behaviour and shutting down of possibilities and openness. In the following sentence this is extended to an idea of shapeliness, 'the white way of being round' in (round as in whole, complete, 'rounded') as 'disappointing' and limiting. Such shapeliness is 'something suggesting a pin': a sharp prick, a phallus, or something which keeps things together, as in sewing. This creates a tension between the queer sexuality of 'box' and 'cow' and the ordering devices which control or repress them. The last part of the poem seems to suggest an alternative: to examine things anew in order to 'see a fine substance strangely', and that in this way things might not point to their complementary or opposite – in the natural, usual, or shapely order – but rather would 'point again' in a newness or strangeness of everyday perception and apprehension of things.

To look at this poem as the (literal) background or etymology of *iduna* sheds light on edwards' attitude towards convention and habitual perception. Her spatial and visual practice within the text can be seen as akin to Stein's treatment of the box (and, indeed, her writing practice more generally): to reconsider established form in order to see things anew. In edwards' work, the box is comparable to the book form. The book is both a container of words, and as an established idea or concept with traditional values, expectations and hierarchies attached to it. If the book is a box then edwards' box is spilling out, defying an ordered 'shapeliness' and challenging habitual perceptions about the book as a form and concept through treating the book as a dynamic and three-dimensional space. Words cluster, fall off the edges of pages, interrupt each other and crowd each surface. There's a sense of

departure from the established form, and this seems in dialogue with the Stein poem that saturates the background of the book.

Whilst edwards' references to Stein are in a very different context to the reference in Bergvall's text – the references in *iduna* being to a particular poem of Stein's rather than Stein as a cultural figure within the queer canon – there are similarities in their (re)use of Stein's work and body. Firstly, Bergvall was surely influenced by Stein's practice in her use of repetition to shift meaning, as I have outlined, and, similarly, edwards' use of Stein in the context of thinking about the gender variance can also be read as referring to Stein's public reputation as a masculine lesbian. There are also striking similarities in the way that both authors use Stein as a backdrop to the work. Halberstam, writing of Stein's perceived masculinity, states that as well as enacting a form of unbecoming through supporting this perceived masculinity, Stein's work itself could also be read as a form of queer negativity: 'Stein could easily be folded into the apolitical anti-social agenda of [Lee] Edelman and [Leo] Bersani with her refusal to make sense and to mean in any conventionally clichéd ways'.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Bergvall's resistance to sublimating binaries of difference and sameness which 'straighten' the line of queer desire can be seen as a form of queer negativity through its basis in denial (*not* this and *not* that).<sup>134</sup> This can be extended to a language practice in which shifts, contrasts and contingency are privileged over fixed meaning in the form of

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<sup>133</sup> Halberstam, 'The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies', p. 145

<sup>134</sup> As I outlined in my introduction, my reservations about Edelman's text lie within the term 'apolitical'. Whilst I am interested in the direction that Halberstam and Love have taken the work of Edelman and Bersani, I do not wish to align edwards or Bergvall with Edelman's notion of apoliticism.

‘this equals that’. edwards, through using Stein’s poem as an etymological underpinning to *iduna*, similarly privileges messiness and contingency over linearity of meaning-making. Both writers conflate Stein’s legacy as a figure of queer gender variance with the legacy of high modernist linguistic experimentalism in order to explore queer gender variance *through* linguistic experimentalism. In doing this, they coming out of line, break the mould, and queer the literary space their language inhabits.

This queer act of coming out of line is also enacted in edwards’ text, on the page opposite the full transcript of the etymological root words from Stein’s poem:

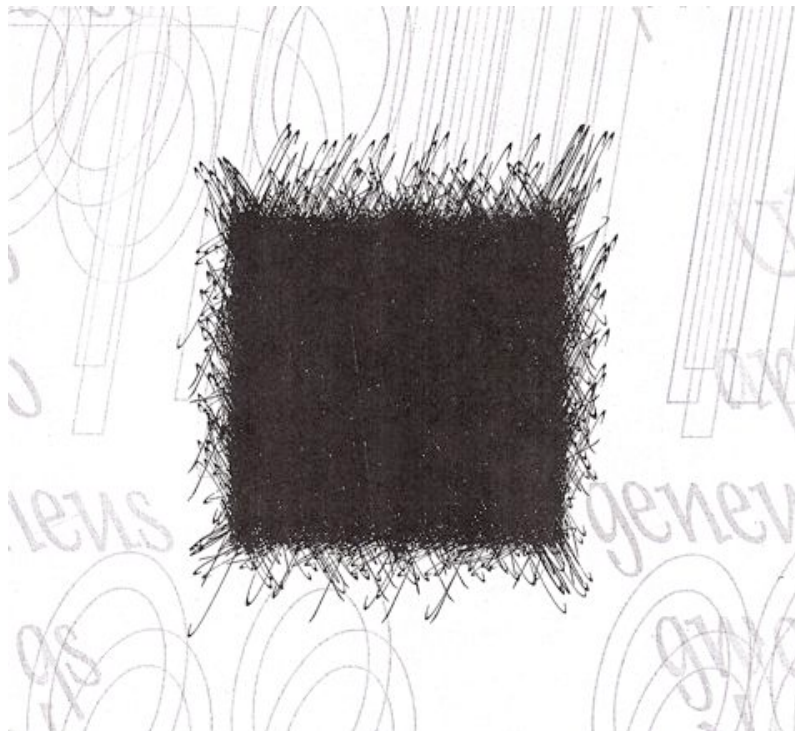


Figure 11. kari edwards, *iduna*, detail from p. 96

This box is one which at once hints at messiness and silence, of shapeliness and coming-out-of-shape or coming-out-of-line. It is also a graphic instance of

refusal through implied erasure. In its messiness and its refusal to ‘speak’ this scribbled box can be read as a failure to communicate. It is an unruly, cluttered (in)version of Bergvall’s blank space, in that it draws attention to its own failure to speak (this time through implied erasure or censorship as a visual mark rather than Bergvall’s neater use of white/blank space). Like *Éclat*, it hovers between remembering and forgetting through a visual, spatial practice which at once acknowledges the censorship and silencing power of hegemonic structures upon queer lives (and so can be read as an act of remembrance) and ‘forgets’ these same structures through refusing to participate in the same system of communication, erasing what has come before.

These formal and spatial elements of the text are mirrored in thematic concerns; there is a preoccupation with gender divides and definitions throughout, and the text seems to work towards complicating gender binaries. ‘november 28<sup>th</sup>’s carrier pigeon’ sets this out quite explicitly:

I am a man being a woman  
 I am a woman being a man  
 I am a homosexual man being a straight woman being a  
 homosexual man –  
 I am a homosexual woman being a straight man being a  
 homosexual woman –  
 [...]  
**I am I**  
 a shadow that becomes  
 the coffin of your dreams<sup>135</sup>

Morton’s installation, Stein’s ‘A Box’ and edwards’ book all deal with perception and social space through the use of real and metaphorical manipulations of spaces. In edwards’ work, this social space is a sexed and

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<sup>135</sup> kari edwards, *iduna* (Oakland: O Books, 2003), p. 16

gendered one, and edwards' disruptions seem to work towards a destruction of binaries, oppositions, divisions and 'boxes'. The first part of this extract enacts a queer manipulation of gender binaries by using similar repetitions and shifts to Bergvall's reworking of the familiar 'object'. Having worked through an increasingly complicated set of gender and sexual identities, the speaker simply asserts that '**I am I**'. Like Bergvall's shifting of the familiar, usable object into unfamiliar territory through acknowledging the singularity of a body's approach and stance towards the world, edwards here seems to depart from the labeling system placed upon queer bodies in order to assert the singular, unqualified 'I'. However, this shirking of established systems of gender and sexual identification in language comes at a cost. Through asserting the self without qualifying it in relation to heterosexual hegemony, a form of unbecoming takes place, the self becomes a 'shadow' and a 'coffin'. Much as the texts I discuss in Chapter One acknowledge the pain, negativity and suffering of queer history, edwards also does not deny the cost of identifying as queer. The space of freedom afforded by breaking the fixity of the heteronormative mould is freighted with a cost of isolation, vulnerability, and otherness. The price to pay for asserting one's identity as queer is often the pain of others, and edwards does not shy away from this dark 'shadow' of queerness.

The twinned disruption of space and binaries can be read, like Bergvall's *Éclat*, as a form of resistance to what Ahmed describes as the unidirectional 'straight lines' of heterosexuality and binary gender construction, lines which we are pressed into through intergenerational social and familial ritual, and

which fix binary identities through ‘pointing’ to an opposite, defining each other through this pointing: ‘[t]he line of straight orientation takes the subject towards what it “is not” and what it “is not” then confirms what it “is”’.<sup>136</sup> As Ahmed outlines, the neatness of this equation as a straight line between two points is difficult and painful to get around. edwards’ commitment to disorder, the denial of straight lines in both in the visual presentation of the text, and a complexity of self-identifications in statements such as ‘I am a man being a woman’, suggest methods of queering space by making us aware of space itself: by drawing attention to its edges, to its limits. It is an investigation of these limits which forms a kind of ‘research’, in Stein’s words, into how to ‘point again’, or point differently.

This research, this ‘point[ing] again’, is evident throughout edwards’ text. Many of the poems function partly as a queer manifesto (not surprising, given edwards’ political commitment as a queer activist and anti-capitalist), as well as performing this ‘pointing again’ through linguistic and visual techniques. ‘it’s time to check your pockets for rockets’ certainly functions in this way. The first part of the text can be read as a manifesto on the spatiality of queer bodies:

isn’t this a tortuous shadow...or instructions on the known possible, a structure top production model that creates bottom markers. deep manuals made-up of speak-n-tell dementia diverting attention getters from central stage colonisation to the far edges of gravity.<sup>137</sup>

The choice between ‘a tortuous shadow...or instructions on the known possible’ seems to recall the previous mention of a ‘shadow’, indicating the choice between a queer life which could potentially be ‘torturous’ or

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<sup>136</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 71

<sup>137</sup> edwards, *iduna*, p. 15

‘instructions on the known’, which can be read as the ‘straight’ path of heterosexual hegemony that bodies are encouraged to follow. We could view hegemonic, heterosexual space as ‘a structure top production model that creates bottom markers’ – a form of inherited conceptual space which is re-enacted continually but which can be altered by altering the space of action itself. This is comparable to Ahmed’s conception of domestic and social heterosexual space. Ahmed writes that ‘the repetition of actions...shapes the “surface” of spaces. Spaces become straight, which allows straight bodies to extend into them’.<sup>138</sup> She refers to this phenomenon as ‘a social gift’ predicated on inheritance and return (p. 91). As such, heterosexual space – which is arguably all hegemonically controlled space – produces heterosexual subjects and allows them to be ‘at home’, to extend themselves. This renders queer subjects external to, or at the least not ‘at home’, in heterosexual space. edwards seems to posit a similar phenomenon, spaces ‘diverting attention getters from centre stage colonizing to the far edges of gravity’. Here queerness (or at least acknowledged, identifiable queerness, as ‘speak-n-tell’ indicates, perhaps a reference to the US military’s recently repealed ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy as well as a reference to the history of queer sexuality as perceived as mental illness or pathology) might be thought of as a form of social ‘dementia’, to be out of mind, or have a disorder of mind – to be bent or otherwise un-straight. This renders the subject at the ‘far edges of gravity’, liminal and in disarray, at risk of free-floating, of coming apart from the world and from worldly order.

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<sup>138</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 192



There's a similarity here between edwards' reference to liminality and Child's theorisation of 'the return of the repressed'. As I outlined in Chapter One, Child's insistence that '[i]t is not that we are "underneath" and surfacing but that we are part of the surface being denied substance' relates to a queer practice and political tactic of using the materials of hegemony in order to critique it, a liberationist queer model as opposed to an ethnic model (which would seek to articulate and assimilate marginalized identities with the same model that keeps them marginalized).<sup>139</sup> Here, edwards similarly uses spatial metaphors to locate queer identity as lost within the surface of culture and public acceptability, and critique that culture through its own language, exposing its inadequacies and its invisibilising power.

The next part of edwards' poem can be read as an explicit reference to the limitations of residing within heterosexual space, and the conditioning nature of this space upon the performance of gender. She also implies the very real danger and violence threatened and done to the queerly gendered body within this space:

fear, and/or its binary sidecar rendezvous does the gender exam ... "I have never been a member of the troubled, discarded or chopped up, listed on the edge of experience, I have always been a member in good standing at the local confession counter."<sup>140</sup>

Fear is coupled with a 'binary side car', the structural pairing which enforce heterosexual behaviour and ensure a linearity of body and mind. Here

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<sup>139</sup> This difference is defined by Jagose as the split between ethnic and liberationist models of homosexual politics: '[a]ccording to the liberationist model, the established social order is fundamentally corrupt, and therefore the success of any political action is to be measured by the extent to which it smashes that system. The ethnic model, by contrast, was committed to establishing gay identity as a legitimate minority group, whose official recognition would secure citizenship rights for lesbian and gay subjects'. (Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p. 61)

<sup>140</sup> edwards, *iduna*, p. 15

edwards lays out the conditions of citizenship, of being able to inhabit heterosexual space. Gill Valentine writes about the enforced performance and naturalisation of heterosexuality in the 'heterosexual street' (street being a metaphor for hegemonic social space). She writes of how acts such as a lesbian couple kissing in a supermarket can underline the assumption that public space is "naturally" or "authentically" heterosexual,<sup>141</sup> and that geographical power structures exist in order to maintain and enforce the illusion of authenticity and the primacy of heterosexual space, including the relegation of queer spaces to ghettoized parts of urban areas (p. 147-8). She also argues that the coherence of gender identity and sexuality is part of this regulation – you must both *identify as* and *be identified as* (externally) heterosexual in order to inhabit this space. She argues that power structures, geographical division, verbal and physical abuse are signs of the ultimate instability of heterosexual space, as beneath the heterosexual veneer 'space teems with many other possibilities' (p. 154). Similarly, edwards seems to suggest the threat of heterosexual action upon the queer body, implying the social, medical and religious regulation of gender identity through a combination of 'fear' and a binary view of gender. The implication is that in order to occupy a social space one must both not be, and not want to be, queer. Otherwise, one will be relegated to 'the edge of experience', the ghettoized sub-space of queer culture which does not threaten the central space of hegemonic heterosexuality and polarized gender identity.

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<sup>141</sup> Gill Valentine, '(Re)negotiating the "Heterosexual Street": Lesbian Productions of Space', *Bodyspace: Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) pp. 127-145 (p. 147)

Whilst such tactics have much in common with Bergvall's approach to space in *Éclat*, there's an important distinction to be made here. Bergvall's text deals with the semi-private domestic domain of the family home, whereas edwards' text moves through much more public spaces and institutions: shops, roads, schools, hospitals, armies, governments. Twinned, as they are in this thesis, these texts work to critique the oppressive power of both public and private spaces as organized around presumed heterosexuality.

After this critique of public heterosexual space, which renders the subject marginal to culture, the poem shifts in both tone and pace. It moves away from the manifesto form and towards a performance of queer language and queer space: the offer of an alternative. *This* construction 'reflects word assemblages not as a mirror but as prom time'<sup>142</sup> – moving away from the 'mirror' of inherited social form (as well as the Lacanian implications of identity formation this word suggests in the context of psychology and 'dementia') and rather becoming 'prom time' – a kitsch and campy 'assemblage' suggesting performativity and queer irreverence. 'Prom', in the context of the digital (and the text deals with this language frequently, showing an investment in the positive possibilities of the digital age), can also be read as a reference to 'Programmeable Read Only Memory' – a form of memory chip that can be programmed only once by the manufacturer or user. Read in this way, Edwards enables an expansion of space, a space of uniqueness, unrepeatability and 'versions'. This situation does not mirror the existing models of space but challenges them in linguistic playfulness, through a

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<sup>142</sup> edwards, *iduna*, p. 15

‘manual’ imagining and rearrangement of bodies. Phrases such as ‘organize a sufi transistor heart to the light’ and ‘I get static or instant replays of humans dong animal sounds’ (p. 15) suggest the permissiveness of queer space, much like the temporary queer spaces opened up in the ‘house’ of Bergvall’s text. It is the space in which normative articulations of human sexual subjectivity can surface, ‘and all are welcome’ (p. 15).

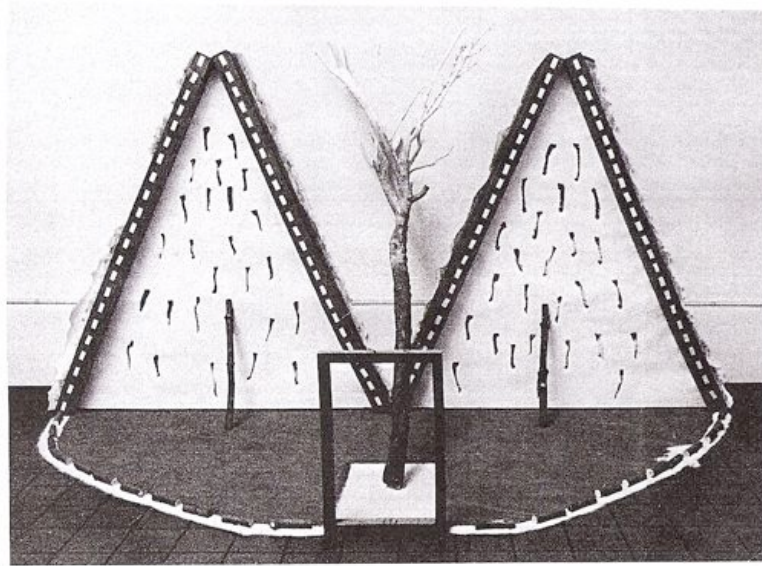


Figure 12. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1972

I now wish to briefly return to Ree Morton’s work, in order to further contextualise edwards’ space-making practices in *iduna*. Morton’s *Untitled* (fig. 12) revisits the relationship between interior and exterior space explored in her earlier work. Whereas *The 2nd Light Piece* seems to explore the space of the artwork as ‘closed’ in relation to the ‘open’ space around it, this structure seems to imply dwelling, and explores the relationship between being inside and outside of structures. The mirroring between the two flat triangular forms, with the two sticks implying human bodies leaning within

them, seems to suggest a couple, and also a house opened out or cross-sectioned. The small entranceway to the piece is blocked by a large branch, so that the piece seems to simultaneously draws us in and block our way as viewers. Again, there are comparisons here to Bergvall's text, in that entrances become questions of being welcome or unwelcome within certain spaces or dwellings. The 'tree' of Morton's piece acts as an intervention in the viewer's identification with the figures and dwelling, so she or he remains outside of and blocked from the 'scene', which at once implies nature and dwelling-place.

*iduna* is comparable to Morton's *Untitled* both in the way that Edwards visually 'opens out' the book space through her refusal to adhere to its spatial confines, and her linguistic critique of hegemonic space. In Chapter One, I discussed how Child and Bellamy critique heterosexual time through a subversive (mis)use of narrative technique, thereby revealing its structured and performative nature and, questioning what may outside of it. Edwards, like Morton, questions the assumed naturalness of the hegemonic space of the book by saturating it with languages and codes that resist linear readings. The twin triangles of 'dwelling' in Morton's piece, the neat and exclusionary space of (implied heterosexual) domesticity, is something Edwards also critiques and challenges in *iduna*. Edwards' treatment of the page is also comparable to the gestural lines of paint within Morton's installation. Eileen Tabios has compared the book to the tattooed and lived-in surface of skin: 'the space is not "white space" – it is the mussed up space of flesh that's shown a lot of living: wrinkles, scars, bruises, love marks, orgasmic stains, lost teeth,

calluses and so on'.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, one could read the visual saturation of the text as a recording of corporeal specificity, the marks and gestures of a life laid bare. There's an emphasis on difference and faulty mirroring; there are times when Edwards shows us hegemonic space, but, as with Morton's piece, we as readers can only ever be external to this space within the text. The text dwells within a specific and enigmatic kind of chaos and disorder. It is neither the mirror of hegemonic social space nor the proper 'book' space of the canon, and it takes pleasure in fragmenting these things through reflecting them slantwise, queerly.

Morton's *Signs of Love* (fig. 13) is a mixed-media installation consisting of low white walls forming an artificial 'room' within a larger installation/gallery space. This 'room' is decorated as a 'homely' and feminine space, implying domesticity and familial life. Words such as 'pleasure', 'poses' and 'gestures' adorn the walls, 'a veritable rococo feast of celastic ladders, curtains, swags, roses, ribbons, and small panel paintings'.<sup>144</sup> Schwartzman and Thomas see the piece as a celebration of familial love and domestic bliss, describing the piece as 'a joyous celebration, satirically ephemeral in tone, almost saccharine in its sentimentality' (p. 65). However, I would argue that Morton's piece can be read in a much more sinister way. Whilst the set-up of the installation and the objects it contains do imply cosy domesticity, the windowless whiteness of the 'walls' give a sense of being trapped,

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<sup>143</sup> Eileen Tabios, 'Review of kari edwards' *iduna*', *Moria Poetry* <<http://www.moriapoetry.com/tabios900.htm>> [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2011] (para. 7 of 17)

<sup>144</sup> Ree Morton: *Retrospective 1971-1977*, p. 65

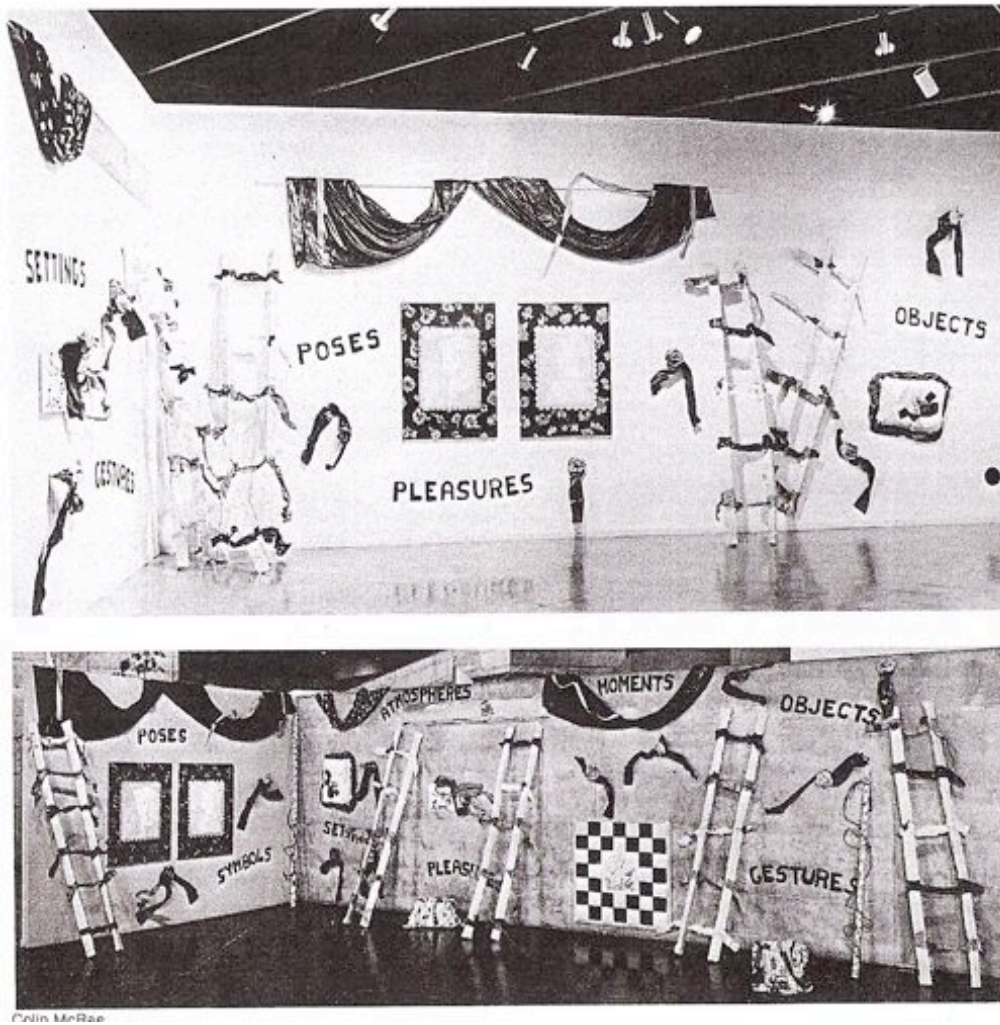


Figure 13. Ree Morton, *Signs of Love*, 1976

closed in. The piece also features numerous ladders which don't stretch up the whole wall, implying the futility of escape and enhancing the claustrophobic feel of the installation. There's also a theme of mirroring, as in much of Morton's work, with ornate but empty frames sitting side by side implying the domestic couple, and yet in their emptiness also suggesting an eerie absence of identity. The installation can be read as the domestic made strange, an alienating feminine space of homely décor stripped of life and shown as a trap or obstacle which cannot be overcome. In its floral tweeness, the space is superficially optimistic and nostalgic, but upon closer inspection is a much more complex and sinister piece. *Signs of Love* can be read as a feminist troubling of the relationship between 'home' space and gender identification. By emphasizing the claustrophobic nature of home space for women historically, and emphasizing home space as structured (through showing structure alone, stripped of content), the piece comments on the relationship between content and context. In some ways the piece could be seen as a working-through of an impossible problem: how can we overcome hegemonic space in art, when there is no other space available?

Similarly, Edwards' poem/manifesto 'dear to those not driving the car,' seems to work through the issue of hegemonic space in relation to language use. Edwards begins:

this is an open letter. this is not a letter. this is the letter "e". there are no letters, in this alphabet, that walks down the street. There are no words that adequately describe anything; they signify already multiple layered stains of history's concrete (cement)/ stone {steel}<sup>145</sup>

The repetition within the piece – 'this is', 'this is not' – suggests the instructive

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<sup>145</sup> Edwards, *iduna*, p. 94



and commanding self-assured tone of the manifesto, but the contradictions and working-through of the repetitions also suggest ways of getting around a problem, ways of thinking outside of the Steinian box of hegemonic space and the language that provides. The layout of the text, written horizontally across two pages with text running vertically in the background and across the tops and bottoms of the pages, requires the reader to turn the book around several times during the reading process. To read the text a reader must enact a 'manual' reorientation of space, perhaps changing the relationship between body and text in a way that might mirror some of the formal and thematic queerings of space that occur in the text: we are forced into a queer phenomenological relationship as readers. However, in some ways this first part of the text seems to conclude in futility, perhaps comparable to the too-short, decorated ladders of Morton's piece – edwards cannot transcend the space of language which has become a 'concrete wall' of history and oppression, and even the act of writing is futile if '[t]here are no words that accurately describe anything'.

Just as Bergvall's use of silence and 'blank' space in *Éclat* can be read as a kind of radical queer passivity, Halberstam's analysis of anti-social forms of queerness is a useful way of thinking about edwards' use of language in this poem. The poem is full of instances of negativity, even from the title, which is addressed to those not in power, *not* driving the car. Similarly, 'dear' can be read both as the beginning of a letter and a term of endearment, an affection towards passivity and passive subjects. Statements such as 'there are no letters' also imply the inadequacy of language, and such

negative statements can definitely be read as ‘anti-social’ and akin to Bergvall’s silence as well as Morton’s inadequately short ladders. Whilst such negativity can be read as ‘useless’, because no ‘positive’ or fruitful alternative is offered from them, Edwards can also be seen to be using a powerful form of political rhetoric through these negative statements. There are similarities here between Edwards’ work and Halberstam’s analysis of Valerie Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto*. Halberstam writes that Solanas recognized that happiness and despair, futurity and foreclosure have been cast as the foundations of certain forms of subjectivity within patriarchy, and she relentlessly counters the production of “truth” within patriarchy with her own dark and perverted truths about men, masculinity and violence.<sup>146</sup> By using an inverted, radicalized and openly violent version of entrenched, pervasive and acceptably violent patriarchal rhetoric, Solanas demonstrates the threat patriarchy poses for women within social space. Rather than inhabiting the voice of the liberal feminist, she critiques the system through denying it, through cutting it up. Whilst this is an extreme example, there are similarities between Halberstam’s appraisal of Solanas’ radically negative political speech acts and Edwards’ rhetoric in *iduna*, critiquing capitalist hegemony through radically negative statements which a reader bashes against like ‘history’s concrete’.

However, later parts of the text suggest that an *awareness* of these limitations (brought about through a negative critique of heterosexual space) can lead to revolutionary acts: ‘maybe it is the awareness of the master

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<sup>146</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 109

tongue, the major language, the institute of proper behaviour...seeing the construct of the construct of the white picketed fence'.<sup>147</sup> Viewed in this way both *iduna* and Morton's installation pieces can be seen as form of artistic and political queer action through drawing attention to the limitations of certain kinds of space, and demonstrating their construction, rather than their concealment as natural or "authentic" heterosexual spaces. Like Morton's empty frames and windowless room-within-a-room, edwards' work exposes 'the construct of the construct'. The later part of the text drops the stark and repetitive 'this is', 'this is not' tone of the beginning, suggesting ways out of the space from within:

Maybe what I am looking at/for is a new way of being/writing speaking (but mostly writing) that is relational to my/or anybody's becoming (not) (not) the "I am a \_\_\_\_ and here's my story" undefined jello-mold with a hole in the bottom, I am leaking, I am leaking, help me, I am leaking on to the floor or your shoes...go ahead lick it up. (p. 95)

The obliques, brackets, ellipses and blanks of this part of the text, as well as the long sentences, indicate the imagining of 'versions', of alternatives to fixed identity (perhaps the same stability of identity that Roof objects to in the heterosexual linear narrative). There's also a kind of breathlessness to the work owing to the punctuation, perhaps indicating undefined boundaries and 'leaking' of meaning, a spilling out of the enclosed space. This is perhaps where edwards' work breaks from the critique of hegemonic space through visual and textual techniques, and begins to define an alternative through leakage and spilling, comparable to the way in which the words of the book spill out over the edges of the pages, and spill or fall 'underneath' the text. It is

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<sup>147</sup> edwards, *iduna*, p. 94

also comparable to edwards' visual version of the box – a space of erasure scribbled and spilling over the edges of the sanctioned geometric space. edwards and Bergvall critique hegemonic public and private spaces, and allow for the possibility of alternatives through this critique. Through techniques of occupation, negativity, faulty mirroring, parataxis, and fluid meaning, both writers allow the queer body to extend into space so that the reader and writer can reorientate themselves within a new, queer, temporary textual space, not ghettoized from but *sculpted* from hegemonic space.

#### IV. PULPING: QUEERING GENRE SPACES IN *SHE!*

As I have outlined in my analysis of Bergvall's *Éclat*, the queering of hegemonic space might begin in the home. Throughout *SHE!*, I have taken Bergvall's subversive investigation and reconfiguration of domestic space as a cue to think about concepts of 'genre' and 'heterosexuality' as forms of 'home' spaces. In Chapter One, I discussed the phrase which begins each prose piece at the beginning of *SHE!* in relation to time, focusing on the 'late' of 'she was late home'. In this chapter, I want to begin my analysis of treatments of space in *SHE!* by looking at this phrase again, and this time focusing on the 'home' of 'she was late home'. From there, I wish to talk about three different types of 'home space' in the text: genre as a home, the body as a home, and domestic space as a home.

In thinking about home and genre, I also want to think about the concept of 'pulping' as a writing practice. 'Pulping' is at once a reference to a writing technique of shredding existing texts and recycling them to make new ones, incorporating pulp fiction material into a text in order to give it a 'pulp' treatment, and 'pulping' genre through disorientating it as a spatial practice. In my discussion of the body as a home, I want to consider the dual policing of the body in public and private hegemonic spaces; the upholding and policing of gender binaries by the state as investigated in Edwards' work, and the powerful straightening power of domestic space in Bergvall's text. Thirdly, in my discussion of domestic space, I want to examine my treatment of each room in the 'home' section of the text in relation to both Bergvall's occupation of domestic space and to Edwards' employment of politically charged and

polemical language in order to highlight the claustrophobic limits of hegemony.

As I have outlined in Chapter One, I wanted the beginning of *SHE!* to imitate and pay homage to the lesbian pulp as a historical queer artifact, at the same time as thinking through some of the problems and contradictions the texts raise for lesbian bodies, lives and textualities. As such, I designed the manuscript to look like a pulp fiction novel: the pocket paperback page size, the gaudy colours of the cover, the font and the layout of the text are all markers of the pulp genre. When a reader enters the text, I wish for them to feel 'at home', if one can think of the expectations and format of genre as a kind of 'home'. As well as its formatting, much of the text is 'pulped' from the (arguably) hegemonic material of lesbian pulp fiction. There are several forms of pulping at work in the project, from the obvious cut-and-paste recycling of my collage techniques to the manipulated, recontextualized 'characters', structures and phrasing used throughout.

However, I didn't want this to be a simple imitation or mimesis: I felt that the complicated history of pulp deserved a more complex response. I wanted the feeling of at home-ness within the text to be a starting point from which to depart, a 'safe' space to be examined again. As Bergvall's text investigates and questions the taken-for-granted nature of 'home' space, so the beginning of *SHE!* sets up a familiar space for a new text which questions the privileges and biases inherent in the 'official' space of the book form. The relationship between *SHE!* and the pulp texts I used as source material for its composition is also comparable to the relationship between Edwards' *iduna* and Stein's 'A

Box': in both, the latter functions as both a linguistic and a cultural underpinning. Just as Edwards contextualizes 'A Box' within an exploration of queer bodies in straight spaces, thereby calling on Stein as both a formal and a cultural influence on the work, *SHE!* uses the kitsch, anachronistic language and cultural aesthetics of the lesbian pulp throughout, so the pulp texts are present within *SHE!* as a formal and linguistic heritage.

However, this heritage does not go unquestioned or uninvestigated; quite the contrary. Ahmed writes of Husserl's table and domestic life being relegated to the background – his philosophy contains a universal and abstract 'table' whilst the real table upon which he writes, and the domestic background that accompanies it, is taken for granted. Ahmed is interested in repositioning a reader to look at what is behind a text and look at objects such as the table anew, to bring them to the 'front'. In doing this, we question the phenomenology of the everyday in relation to issues which are often overlooked in phenomenological writing. Ahmed's approach particularly illustrates how issues to do with a body's corporeality (specifically race, sexuality and gender) can affect the way we interact with everyday objects and the ways in which we navigate space. Ahmed writes that '[w]e may need to supplement phenomenology with an "ethnography of things"',<sup>148</sup> and the beginning of my writing process for this project was similarly an attempt at a form of poetic ethnography – to excavate and investigate the lesbian pulp fiction artefact. In creating a book which looks like 'home' space, the space in which a published work of fiction would traditionally belong, and setting up the

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<sup>148</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 39

imitation of a narrative pulp narrative, I have attempted to excavate the aesthetics and thematics of the pulp text. In going on to question the ethics of the genre and reconfigure the characters, themes and language of the text into a contemporary, experimental poetics, I have both performed a study of the pulp novel as a historical artefact and re-spatialized the text by pulping it, in order to consider the contemporary implications of queer spaces and bodies.

Whilst the text itself begins as an imitation of pulp narrative form, concepts of place and spatiality within the text become increasingly complicated. Locations and types of spaces merge as ‘she’ moves through warzones, cities, computer games, pop culture, economics, academia and corporate environments within the first few pages of prose poetry within the text. Whilst the introduction to the text states that the book is ‘the strange story of a girl, told by herself’ (a phrase cut directly from the beginning of an edition of *Adam and Two Eves*),<sup>149</sup> the collaging of this text with several dismembered body parts (a single leg ‘holding up’ the text with two arms holding eyes on strings as a decorative border) hints at the disordering of self the text may enact. My aim in writing the first section of the book was to create prose poems which mimic the structure, tone and aesthetics of a pulp novel whilst testing and queering the boundaries of this genre.

One tactic I employed as part of my practice in this early stage of the text was excessive repetition, to both create rhythm and to test the limits of genre through demonstrating those limits. As well as beginning each paragraph with

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<sup>149</sup> Anonymous, *Adam and Two Eves* (New York: Royal Books, 1953) p. 1



the phrase 'she was late home', 'she' begins most sentences, and 'she was' begins many. The repetitive structure of the text functions similarly to the domestic spaces within Bergvall's work, in that identity and communication are put under pressure. By treating linear narrative and genre as forms of hegemonic space and heteronormative architecture, and emphasizing this through excessive repetition of common phrases, the limits of what can be said and how 'she' can be communicated are emphasized. In many ways, following from Bergvall, the 'she' in this part of the text can be seen to be under the pressure of hegemonic space, genre being a kind of literary 'inheritance', a straight line. Ahmed writes that

Lines are both created by being followed and followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition.<sup>150</sup>

Just as Bergvall's text seems to engage with this idea through the containment of the body in the hegemonic familial space of the living room, until this body is put under pressure and spills out elsewhere in the house, I began to think of genre as a kind of literary living room, shaping and being shaped by bodies, identities. 'She' is in some ways being brought into line by genre in this first section of the text, limited to repetitive and arguably boring expressions of the self. However, by presenting contradictory information and taking repetition to its limit, the text also functions as a critique of the identity-shaping nature of inherited literary genres. I wanted to create a claustrophobic space much like the living room space in this first part of the text, taking

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<sup>150</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 16

repetition to its limit in order to break the space of genre open in the proceeding pages, a kind of 'domastication' or mangling of genre through excess. Such a treatment also functions similarly to Morton's installation *Signs of Love*, creating a claustrophobic, kitschy version of 'real' space which functions to highlight both the limits of hegemonic space and the structural frames which organize and shape individuals.

My commitment to the pulp aesthetic, as well as being rooted in my desire to create the illusion of the 'home' space of recognizable genre, was also influenced by edwards' commitment to the 'immersive, sculptural space' of a text. Even though the text morphs between prose poetry, verse, collage, illustration and visual poetry, and although the text moves away from its roots in pulp fiction towards finding more contemporary expressions for and perspectives on sexuality and desire, I wanted to maintain the pulp aesthetic in order for the text to become an immersive space. This was also necessary for each iteration of 'she' and 'I' to remain linked. The 'she' of these paragraphs is not stable but constantly shifting and being reworked, much like the 'i' in edwards' 'november 28<sup>th</sup>'s carrier pigeon'. This part of the text is thus comparable to edwards' scribbled, messy box, just breaking out of the edges of the hegemonic space of genre, testing boundaries and limits through morphing the identity of 'she' and a faulty mirroring of the pulp genre.

During my research – particularly, my readings of Bachelard, Ahmed and Bergvall – I became increasingly interested in investigating the actual domestic spaces within lesbian pulp fiction, and converting them into investigative poems within my own project. I reread my 'source' novels and

extracted text which dealt specifically with four rooms within a house: living rooms or parlours, kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms. It seemed to me that these four rooms, as well as being the four almost guaranteed to be found within every home, might also play four very different roles in shaping the self, and thus require four very different types of queer intervention.

I began with the living room or parlour, considering it to be the most 'public' of private spaces within a house. In my readings of pulp texts, it became apparent that this room was often the scene of awkward first meetings, confrontation, and ultimatums; usually between a lesbian protagonist and a figure of authority, normally either a husband, a parent, or a figure from an institution such as a doctor, a psychiatrist, or a professor. I wanted to work with these themes of formality, the institution and confrontation in the first room in order to explore notions of heterosexual inheritance within both homes and institutions.

I began writing this poem with a certain attachment to the term 'living room', because of the way it might dictate a certain form of 'living', reinforced by the scenes of confrontation that take place in this room in the lesbian pulp novels I was working with. This perspective was also influenced by Ahmed's extension of Butler's thesis on gender: that we might become straight, and that spaces we dwell within might facilitate this becoming, furthered by notions of family inheritance, the 'promise of return' and queerness as an origin of 'bad feelings' within families. However, as I began writing I realized that including the term 'living room' might be too obvious or prescriptive a connection, as well as too close to Bergvall's investigation of the living room in

*Éclat*. My commitment to investigating the cultural history of the room, as well as its specific history within the lesbian pulp genre, coupled with my reading of these histories as formal and semi-public sites of hegemonic control and confrontation, resulted in me using the more archaic, prim term ‘parlour’. This word also helps to bridge the gap between private and public space, in that a parlour is also used as a suffix for public, social spaces, such as ‘ice cream parlour’ or ‘funeral parlour’. Its etymology, from the French ‘parler’, meaning ‘to speak’, also connotes sociality within the family home: it is the public ‘face’ or ‘front’ (room) of the home. This sociality of the family home, as Ahmed writes, becomes a heterosexual domain: ‘the family home puts objects on display that measure sociality in terms of the heterosexual gift’ (p. 90). One could think of these ‘gifts’, passed down through generations, as heirlooms: objects and finance which signify stability, continuity and hegemonic sociality. Ahmed points out that such objects orientate us in certain ways and can create the effect of RSI (p. 91) from ‘accumulative points of attachment’ that make it difficult, even painful, to deviate from the family line. These social pressures were something I wanted to deal with directly in this poem, the first of the sequence of rooms I write through, in order to break away from such attachments whilst attempting to deal honestly with the implications of this turn away, both in terms of psychological pain and physical endangerment. Whilst, as I have outlined, Bergvall deals with the formality of this social domesticity through silence, stuttering and refusals – emphasising the ‘foreign’-ness of the speaker – I wanted to continue to investigate hegemonic formal structures through mimesis and exaggeration. The fairly strict formal

structure of the piece – a series of mostly ten-syllable, six line stanzas, centred on the page, using none of the collaging, palimpsestic or non-standard visual techniques of other poems within the text – was a deliberate composition choice in order to mimic and investigate the formality of the room. Within the context of my experimental background as a writer, the poem is also fairly conservative in terms of its composition: there is a stable, lyric ‘I’, (in contrast with the shifting, paratactic, self-in-progress ‘she’ which runs through much of the text,) fairly traditional natural and religious imagery, a sense of nostalgia, a fairly regular rhythm and frequent use of alliteration and repetition. In doing this it was my hope to create a sense of familiarity and a connection with the past, with a traditional heritage, poetically speaking. This is a very different formal approach to Bergvall’s take on the living room in *Éclat*; whilst I was interested in queering the space of the living room through effecting a turn away from hegemony and heterosexual inheritance, I wanted to perform my own form of ‘domastication’ through using the tools of (poetic) hegemony to mimic, discuss, and destroy the heterosexual hegemony of the parlour space.

Through writing the poem I wished emphasize the parlour both as a site of intervention and confrontation within pulp novels, and as a site of heterosexual heritage and inheritance, both of which allow us, in Ahmed’s words, to be ‘pressed into lines’<sup>151</sup> from which it is difficult to deviate. I wanted to create a specific ‘parlour’ with a specific occupant, whilst at the same time referring historically and politically to a conceptual ‘parlour’ which represents

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<sup>151</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 17

both private and social barriers to queer existence. It is for this reason I refer in the poem to the figure of the 'mother', as representative both of actual familial relations in jeopardy (and the consequent psychological damage of stepping out of line with family expectations and the expected inheritance of the family line, as Ahmed describes in her analysis of Freud's famous case study, outlined in his 1920 paper 'The Psychogenesis of a *Case of Homosexuality in a Woman*', in which Ahmed interprets the woman's psychic pain as originating not from the supposed deviance of her desire in itself but rather her sadness at being the 'origin of family grief' (p. 75)) and also as an abstract form of social care and positive regard, the place from which one came. The grief of the mother in the poem ('mother is by the bureau, my schoolgirl god / in a coat made for crying') implies a wrongdoing and an imminent turning away, a distancing of mother and daughter, which is followed up as the mother does become more distant and less visible through each stanza: 'mother is by the door, & it is hard / to see her through the smoke'; 'mother's by the mantle, it's too dark to see'; 'mother has left the room'.

This distancing and departure is coupled with imagery of increasing violence and threat: darkness, smog, extreme conditions of fire and snow, collapse, fights, bruises, police, bombs. In writing this poem it was my aim to at once convey the pain and the necessity of deviating from inherited norms, and in this case the room is 'queered' through violence, destruction, and the departure of the 'mother', representing family, a sense of 'home', and normative sociality. In the last stanza of the poem I have suggested an

alternative form of subcultural sociality: ‘a series of arms appear / to wrap around each other in blind / solidarity’. In doing this I was influenced by Judith Halberstam’s concept of queer ‘counterpublics’, subcultures which emphasize ‘transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation’,<sup>152</sup> and which might replace inherited hegemonic life structures as represented by the actual and metaphorical versions of the parlour (and the objects and people it contains) represented in my poem. Rather than replacing the parlour, or any other room in the house, with a queer ‘version’ of itself which might encourage a form of neo-liberal inclusivity, I have attempted to question and, ultimately, destroy the room in order to create the sense of a diasporic and transient queer space. However, through moving the voice within the parlour to a subculture, the voice is silenced within hegemonic space, each stanza fading further into invisibility on the page. This visual element was something I wanted to play with as an extension of Bergvall’s tactics of silence and ‘blank’ page space, emphasising the not-heard, the not- belonging, and then seeking out alternate spaces in which to speak.

In the previous section of this chapter I contrasted Bergvall’s ‘private’ home space with Edwards’ focus on ‘public’ social spaces. In ‘parlour’, I wanted to utilize the social heritage of the room as a place where public and private meet. Whilst I have been influenced by Bergvall’s investigation of the social regulation of this room, I have also been inspired by Edwards’ investigation into socialized sexuality and the potential psychological control and damage done by state intervention into instances of gender variance and

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<sup>152</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 154

queer sexuality. The departure of the 'mother', coupled with the implication of fearfulness and bodily harm throughout the poem, are designed to recall instances of state intervention in these semi-public parlour spaces which occur in pulp novels. I also wanted to reflect more philosophically on what role the hegemonic governance of the room itself plays in such intervention and such psychological damage: once the mother has left, taking with her the line of family inheritance and the structured approval of heterosexuality which organizes the home, the parlour collapses.

Another way in which edwards' *iduna* influenced the poem was the connection between a commitment to queer sexuality and radical left, anti-capitalist politics. Such a connection does not begin with edwards; as Halberstam points out, it has long been a cornerstone of the queer movement, being part of 'an oppositional politics which has both anti-racist and anti-capitalist dimensions'.<sup>153</sup> However, I was particularly interested in edwards' appropriation of the language of the state, as well as the language of consumerism, in order to critique the threatening control both of these forces have upon the body. It is not a coincidence that 'parlour' contains multiple references to the state and to violent political action; I wrote it shortly after the first of the many protests against public spending cuts in London at the end of 2010 and beginning of 2011. Using the language and context of pulp fiction alongside this more radical and oppositional violent rhetoric of protest allowed me to think about the link between the two, and in 'parlour' I attempted to investigate how using queer tactics of linguistic experimentalism might not just

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<sup>153</sup> Halberstam, 'The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory', p. 41



create a space for queer bodies, but might also have the potential to provide a model for writing about other forms of social oppression, and, finally, to consider whether that might be part of what a queer writing practice is about: searching for alternatives to oppressive cultural and political models through the appropriation of the language and form of those models.

The second room in the sequence is the kitchen. I initially saw my treatment of this room to be the 'back' room, the room, historically, within which a woman's labour is most intensive, and one that is hidden from the social 'front' side of the house, the parlour. I was interested in creating an irreverent and humorous misuse of the kitchen through the language of the poem in order to overturn this whilst paying homage to the wealth of feminist writing on the role of women's work within the home.<sup>154</sup> Ahmed also refers to this feminist history of kitchen misuse, writing particularly of the use of kitchen tables to produce the work of feminist presses. Ahmed writes that '[t]o use the table that supports domestic work to do political work...is a reorientation device',<sup>155</sup> and the tactic of using the domestic politically was something I wanted to play with whilst writing the poem. However, this was complicated when I re-examined the use of kitchens in lesbian pulp fiction: the kitchen was often the site of emotional and sexual same-sex encounters, and very little labour is mentioned. I thus wanted to merge these two concepts to explore the

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<sup>154</sup> In particular, I was responding to Simone de Beauvoir's account of the destructive nature of housework for women, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's proposition that women become the 'weaker' sex through being physically and psychologically confined to the home. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Paishley (London: New English Library, 1962) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002).

<sup>155</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 61

gap between woman as kitchen labourer and the kitchen as the site of female-female sexual encounters.

One ‘voice’ I wished to take on within the piece was the humorously inept domestic woman, with a ‘dry slice of crappiest heaven / in the oven’, suggesting reluctance, laziness and inability, refusing the gendered heritage of domestic work. I also wanted to further this by thinking about the non-reproductive female body, with sexual imagery coupled with the digestive, rather than the reproductive, system: ‘with breasts / made of pudding you purge and girdle’. The uncoupling of sexual acts from reproduction is an obviously (though not exclusively – many queer-identified people do have children, many heterosexual people do not) queer territory, and this is also something I wanted to emphasize in the poem. The playfulness of the work also takes on a more sinister tone at times; the phrase ‘shake the baby awake’ was something I wrote in order to couple the concept of domestic ineptitude and refusal with reproductive ineptitude and refusal, the bad cook morphing into the bad mother, refusing inherited roles of caring and providing. There’s also a play on ‘butcher’, both being a ‘butcher brother’ and enacting a butchering of a brother, again hinting at the violence and destruction of queer lives historically.

The poem as a whole is a departure from the serious formality of the ‘parlour’ into a more playful ‘versioning’ of sexual and social selves within the kitchen space. The humour I employ within the poem was something very much influenced by my readings of Edwards and Bergvall. I wanted to play with a variant of Bergvall’s use of the term sister through my own use of

‘sibling’ language in order to both investigate and humorously send up the sublimation of queer desire to a sibling relationship, whilst also referring historically to the use of ‘sisterhood’ and ‘brotherhood’ as terms of political sociality and affiliation. My repetition of phrases prefixed with ‘PRESS RESET’ was something influenced by edwards’ poem ‘november 28<sup>th</sup>’s carrier pigeon’, in which, as I have discussed, edwards creates statements which, rather than being accumulative markers of identity, function as paratactic and morphing ‘versions’ of a complex queer self. Similarly, the phrase ‘PRESS RESET’ indicates contingency of identity and the ability to undo and remake the self with each statement. It is my hope that the playfulness of the kitchen opens out the space historically functioning as the site of a woman’s repetitive domestic labour and allows for other possibilities for action and, consequently, other versions of selves.

The bathroom struck me, culturally, as the most private room of the house, it being the only room traditionally occupied alone and fitted with a lock. It is also simultaneously the cleanest and dirtiest room of the house: it’s the place one goes to wash, to become clean, but also the room that contains waste and germs, and thus the place with the most emphasis on hygiene. This dichotomy of cleanliness and dirtiness was something I wanted to explore in the poem, initially through scatological imagery and the historical association of sexuality, particularly queer sexuality, with privacy and dirtiness. My research into the role of bathrooms in lesbian pulp fiction, however, changed the direction of my practice in ‘bathroom’. Bathrooms in pulp fiction are often used as the site of shame, humiliation and violence,

particularly sexual violence and its aftermath. I therefore decided to use the theme of the bathroom to examine performatively the role of shame and sexual violence in queer history.

The poem itself was composed using a combination of descriptions of bathroom spaces and objects ('a set of matching units', 'lavatory yellow', 'cologne, toothpaste') instances of sexual violence and its aftermath within the pulp texts ('*torn and bruised from sullen arms*', 'unhook her with scissors') and a more distanced critical reflection on the relationship between queer sexuality and instances of physical and psychological violence ('whose insides? Whose production? Whose crime?'). I was particularly interested in negative and 'backward' emotions associated with these things, such as shame, body dysmorphia, self-hatred, discomfort and anxiety.

The physical structure of the poem is designed to further this critical and creative investigation into the relationship between physical violence (carried out by individuals and ratified by hegemony), psychological violence (both as a direct aftermath of physical violence and as carried out by the state apparatus that enforces binary gender identification and discourages deviation from the path of heterosexuality) and corporeal unease. Each page consists of two stanzas, and the second, faded stanza is designed to appear as a mirror or shadow of the first. In doing this I wanted to further investigate the notion of heterosexual sublimation of queer desire, as I've analysed in Bergvall's use of familial terms such as 'uncle' and 'sister' to playfully imply heterosexual re-interpretation of queer female-female relationships and the public interpretation of the 'masculine' lesbian body. However, rather than

being playful, it is in this instance more menacing, recalling edwards' poem 'it's time to check your pockets for rockets', particularly the line 'fear, and/or its binary sidecar rendezvous does the gender exam'. edwards' poem deals with the psychological damage possible when there's a discrepancy between self-identification and state or medical identification, and, similarly, 'bathroom' creates an imperfect mirror to imply a moving away from binaries, whilst also invoking a shadow or menace which is designed to imply an underbelly or haunting.

Just as with 'parlour', I was influenced here by Ahmed's account of the psychic pain of deviating from the sexual line, as well as her account of queer unhappiness and in her paper 'Happiness and Queer Politics'.<sup>156</sup> In a similar way to Halberstam's alignment of queer politics with aspects of passivity and negativity as a counterpoint to the liberal humanist alignment of politics with positivity and action, Ahmed's account of queer unhappiness aligns unhappiness with freedom, opening up a 'perhaps' which allows for the imagination of other spaces. In 'bathroom' I was interested in creating a space of negativity and violence in order both to be true to aspects of queer subjectivity and the phenomenology of being in the world within this subjectivity, and to emphasize the negativity and unhappiness present within the lesbian pulp genre as a crucial aspect of their allowance for publication. Having analyzed edwards' use of negativity and violence in *iduna*, I was interested in using violent language taken from pulp texts, which often renders the 'she' of these texts a victim of her own pathologized sexuality as much as

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<sup>156</sup> Sara Ahmed, 'Happiness and Queer Politics', *World Picture* 3 (2009)  
 <[http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP\\_3/Ahmed.html](http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_3/Ahmed.html)> [accessed 10th December 2011]

a victim of external violence, alongside a more political and direct type of rhetoric which might address such issues head-on. In terms of a writing strategy, I also wanted to resist creating a sealed linearity of meaning, a 'neat' box, if you will, which might read as prescriptive or render the 'she' of my text fixed rather than mobile within the world of the book space I have created.

The result is a poem whose language moves between painfully intimate expressions of psychic and physical pain – 'whack me on the carriageway then nurse I my wounds' – and physical resistance to such violence through a morphing of the body to fit (rather than be shaped by) the clean, sterile violence of the bathroom: 'she puffs I her body out as wall to wall canvas I of stretched skin'.

It is my hope that through using such violent accounts of pain and unhappiness within this poem alongside a more detached, radical and political vocabulary, I have at once acknowledged the threat of hegemonic control upon queer bodies and posited modes of resisting such control, partly through equal and opposite acts of violence (such as the body-under-threat spreading itself out, much like the bodily extension which occurs in Bergvall's text) and partly through this violence and negativity *in itself*. *iduna's* messiness, implying breaking moulds, deviation from straightness, and faulty mirroring, has influenced my treatment of the bathroom in that both the formal structure and the language choices within the poem are designed to act as a faulty mirror to damaging forms of social control upon queer bodies. I attempted this by representing them without creating a victim narrative and by countering them with a purely negative and guttural language: not the hopeful intact body

but the dysmorphic, unhappy, suicidal, dirty, bloody and mortal body which transforms the space of the bathroom from a clean, private one, to a violent, dangerous and defiled space which is made public through the 'ghost' or reflection of social violence it holds within it, in the form of this 'she' who is inhabiting it.

The bedroom is the most queerly liberated of the four rooms I work through in *SHE!* Having investigated forms of public and private control through hegemonic heterosexual inheritance, social pressure, tradition, and tactics of violence and shame, and having queered the forces of these things through the use of mimicry, subversive violent imagery, humour and rhetoric, I wanted the bedroom to a site of temporary queer dwelling, a joyous disorientation. After Bergvall, I wanted to use the frame of the bedroom to allow for an 'intimate immensity' of self to appear. This is immediately evident in my more experimental use of space and typography within the poem, as I attempted to play with the page in order to create, after edwards, an 'immersive, sculptural space' through which to write queer sexual experience. The source language I used to construct the poem is taken from the middle part of the lesbian pulp texts I used, where the romance and sexuality of the lesbian couple plays out, before external intervention and cultural shame take hold to end each affair. The irregular placement of words and lines, as well as differences in size and boldness of font, indicate breathlessness. They also have the effect of fragmenting and generating ellipses within the poem, stressing the difficulty of clarity of communication within queer desire. The first stanza of the poem is arranged so that the words seem to be tumbling off the

page, and I wanted both the form and the language of the stanza to indicate a coming out of line, a queering. '[M]y love is like a button' is a reference to Stein's *Tender Buttons*, and also a reference to Edwards' and Bergvall's Steinian influence, forming a queer archive. The lines '& with terror she did undo / me in doorways' refers simultaneously to the 'terror' and pain of going off-line, explored in the other three rooms, and also to the positive possibilities of the 'doorway' as an in-between space, influenced by Bergvall's treatment of the doorway and Perec's description of the doorway as the portal between private/personal and public/political.

As the poem progresses, the form moves from a breathless tumbling of language to a more structured, dense and rhythmical composition. The fourth page of text is designed to give a simultaneous sense of continuity and rupture. Repetition and alliteration ('dumbness, us—us—', 'dumb desire', 'husky horns') create a sense of rhythm whilst the gap running through the middle of each line ruptures the line and gives a sense of interruption or taking a breath. This, again, is an attempt to merge the personal/private world of individual sexuality with the public/political world of queer and gender politics. The language of the piece shifts between the two: words and phrases such as 'criticise' or 'irked by work' suggest social and political discourse, whereas corporeal imagery and the sense of broken rhythms in the poem, along with the last two lines, 'getting down on that / happy happy hand', suggest the intimacy and privacy of a sexual encounter. This gives way, in the last stanza of the poem, to a calmer pace and more even layout of text. I wanted to achieve, through writing the intimacy of a sexual encounter, a temporary



space of less complicated, negative and violent imagery, and the last stanza is an attempt to express this, an homage to queer 'off-human' love. Part of what I wanted to do in 'bedroom' was also to mirror it with 'parlour': just as I began the rooms series with a tactic which linked domestic life to state control and oppression, I wanted to finish by thinking about what it would be like to turn the most private room of the house into a subcultural 'social' space, bringing an altered form of diasporic, queer domesticity back into the realm of the social through representing an alternative model of non-reproductive, non-alienated and non-state-controlled queer sexual desire.

However, just as in Bergvall's *Éclat*, such utopian spaces are transitory and fleeting. The final part of the text is a depressing return to space as it was, everything popping back into place. In these final pages I wanted to create a sense of restless boredom and a desire to escape from 'the endless terror of furniture and dialogue'. In this I was influenced by treatments of hegemonic space in Morton's *Signs of Love* and edwards' 'dear to those not driving the car'. As I have discussed, both pieces deal in different ways with the 'trap' of hegemonic space and the difficulty of overcoming it, of imagining other spaces. In this last part of the text, having imagined alternatives through my reworking of the four rooms, the sense of futility and imprisonment is more acute. From the queer freedom of the bedroom, the text moves back to the confines of heterosexual domesticity: '[e]ach day a wall, a depression, a vacancy of infants. Put the mirror back, pour each into her to reconstruct the whole'. The 'wall' here recalls the walls of Morton's *Signs of Love* and the 'cement' of edwards' 'dear to those not driving the car', whilst the mirror

implies the re-instatement of the binaries of gender, as well as the heterosexual 'pointing' of sameness and difference as outlined by Ahmed; it is a reinstatement of the heterosexual straight lines of architecture running through the house. One collaged line on the penultimate page of the text alludes to the method of transformation which allowed for a temporary escape from this construction: 'at last we revolted and it was architecture'. However, this is but a small fragment of nostalgia in the downbeat, pessimistic final section of text, and the book ends with a direct quotation cut from Paula Christian's *This Side of Love*, a pulp fiction novel:

As much of an alien to herself as  
the day you first saw her,  
and more terrifying as she must  
live with this shell for all the days  
of her life and never  
know why or what for.

Influenced by Bergvall's structure in *Éclat*, as well as the well-theorized necessity of the temporary and transient nature of queer space, I felt it would be false to end with anything other than a return to a hegemonic spatial arrangement. Furthermore, I wanted to bring the text back to its root, its etymology, by grounding it back within the structure and language of the lesbian pulp narrative, with its necessary conclusion of heterosexual gratification and the punishment of deviancy and deviations. Finally, having examined both Bergvall's and Edwards' work alongside Halberstam's analysis of queer negativity, it seemed dishonest and even unethical for me to end the book in any other way. Ahmed writes that

the illusion that same sex object choices have become accepted and acceptable (that civil partnerships mean queer civility) both conceals the ongoing realities of discrimination, non-recognition and violence, and

requires that we approximate the straight signs of civility. *We must stay unhappy with this world.*<sup>157</sup>

Having struggled throughout with the line between poem and manifesto, between creating queer utopias within the book space and critiquing heterosexual hegemony, Ahmed's statement seemed to clarify my own position: whilst the dream of a utopian queer space is enabled within the text through a violent appropriation of heterosexual rhetoric and architecture, the circular nature of the text is firstly a more honest account of the actual situation of queer subjects, and secondly a creative device which might be more likely to prompt thought and action towards achieving such a space on the part of the reader. By insisting on a circular return to the oppressive, regular arrangements of spaces in which they began, all three texts come to moments of 'remembering'. As my analysis of Child and Bellamy in Chapter One discusses the turn backward towards history, these texts also turn 'back': firstly to show us the 'back' or 'wrong' angle of a space, a word, or a text (to orientate us queerly within the text), and secondly to go back to where they started – to return, or turn backward. In doing this, they face the uncomfortable reality of living within a marginalized, subcultural community, and the accompanying unhappiness and pain of living as a devalued person. Glimpses of the possibilities queer spaces can offer disorientate and provoke a reader, and the painful turn back denies the reader a utopian escape from the uncomfortable realities of the time and space in which we live.

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<sup>157</sup> Ahmed, 'Happiness and Queer Politics' (para. 40 of 71)

## CONCLUSION

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This thesis has attempted to discuss the generation of alternative forms of time and space within contemporary queer experimental writing. Through examining the work of Abigail Child, Dodie Bellamy, Caroline Bergvall and kari edwards alongside recent theory pertaining to the relationship between sexuality, time and space, I have argued that particular forms of time and space are generated when queerness is a central feature of experimentalism as a writing practice. Furthermore, I have attempted to pinpoint specific techniques of writing that might constitute a queer, experimental writing practice. I would now like to outline these specific techniques, and reflect upon the implications of a queer poetic practice within the current socio- economic environment. Whilst the work I have discussed has been produced over the last three decades, it seems that the need to seek radical alternatives to hegemony has never been more pertinent, and that the productive relationship between queer and anticapitalist politics might mean that all of these works, including my own, can provide standpoints from which to view and critique the contemporary world, in order that we might imagine it differently.

Early stages of my research and my creative practice were geared towards asking this question in relation to literary form. I felt a conflict from the beginning with my methodology of practice: on the one hand, I was fetishizing

and utilizing lesbian pulp fiction as part of a shadowy queer archive, a sort of kitsch monument to pre-stonewall suffering and the subsequent birth of the modern homosexual. On the other hand, like many queer writers and theorists, I felt a dissatisfaction with the neat and well-behaved productivity of the linear narrative form these texts took, seemingly replicating existing heterosexual and hegemonic life structures. However, this conflict can in itself be productive, and in my analysis of the use of collage in Child and Bellamy, I have demonstrated how an anachronistic attitude towards source materials, a leaning towards 'low' culture through an engagement with genre (pornography, film noir and pulp fiction), and a reflexive critique of linear narrative all result in forms of queer time being produced in this work. The main features of this queer time are: queer anachronisms (an uncovering or revisiting of 'lost' time through referencing and recalling artifacts from the queer archive), an emphasis on the present (through temporal disordering, an emphasis on the moment rather than the sequence, looping and disordering of temporal linearity, sudden movements back and forwards in time), and a denial of hegemonic reproductive meaning through the disordering of cause and effect. I also posit that such manipulations and generations of time might in many ways reflect the upsetting, hidden history of persecution and marginality that queer subjects have occupied in relation to heterosexual hegemony. Furthermore, I argue that the texts hold a tension between remembering (through anachronistic references and the use of source materials) and forgetting (through collage and temporal disordering), and as such produce a queer form of time which at once acknowledges queer

marginalization and denies the taking up of this position through experimental practices which allow the world to be imagined differently and queerly.

In the second half of this thesis I moved towards a focus on the generation of forms of queer space. Through close readings of Bergvall and Edwards, I argue that through the insertion of a body/voice of the queer 'other', hegemonic public and private spaces can be morphed temporarily into alternate and queer architectures. I also argue that the avant garde tradition of nonstandard typesetting and an emphasis on the visual within experimental writing might lend itself well to queer expressions of self, skewing the space and allowing for the otherwise inexpressible to become expressed through the combinations of word and image that occur in all three texts.

Through the thesis, I also move towards a discussion of negative space and negative utterance. This was not my intention upon starting this project. My initial hopes for both my creative project and this thesis were more positive and utopian: a thesis that might begin to assemble a canon of queer experimental poetics, and a creative project that at once paid homage to queer artifacts in the past and laid some ground for the future of queer writing through utilizing some of the techniques studied and assembled through my research. My move from this position towards one of partiality and failure (both through my theoretical leaning towards these terms and in the circular and arguably futile structure of some of the texts I examine within the thesis, including my own) might, in retrospect, be in keeping with the nature of queerness as a mobile standpoint, particularly within the current economic and political environment. Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* posits that a

preoccupation with queer failure may in part be an answer to recent political and economical failures:

Toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as the United States slipped into one of the worst financial crises since the Great Depression and as economists everywhere threw up their hands and said that they had not seen the financial collapse coming, as working people lost their homes due to bad mortgages and the middle class watched their retirement accounts dwindle to nothing because of bad investments, as rich people pocketed ever bigger bailouts and sought shelters for their wealth, as casino capitalism showed its true face as a game played by banks with someone else's money, it was clearly time to talk about failure.<sup>158</sup>

In many ways, the creative works discussed in this thesis (including my own practice) can be seen as forms of 'failure': through the refusal of hegemonic, heteronormative linearity of meaning and a subsequent lack of productive/reproductive meaning-making, a queer temporality is produced. However, the resistance to accumulations of meaning means that the texts can be seen as failures through their refusal to 'move' anywhere, and this refusal can be seen as a form of political process against accumulating meanings within hegemonic systems of historical oppression. Stuck between remembering a forgotten past and forgetting a painful past, they are, in Halberstam's terms, texts that face 'the threat of no future'.<sup>159</sup>

Equally, through the occupation of public and private hegemonic space, the texts discussed in Chapter Two provide imaginative alternatives to this through the creation of temporary queer architectures. However, these spaces always remain occupied rather than owned outright, and end with an inevitable coming-into-line of this space: hegemony could be seen to 'win out'

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<sup>158</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 87

<sup>159</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, p. 2

in this way. Furthermore, the writers I have studied seem to some extent committed to such failures and shortcomings. In an interview I conducted with Bergvall, she talks about her use of Hans Bellmer's doll sculptures within her second book, *Goan Atom*:

'[the sculptures are] interesting for thinking about queerness as a minority sexuality, a minority body, a body overloaded with negative or passive connotations. It worked quite well to acknowledge queer poetics as something that is a part of this new body. I didn't feel the need to do a New Eve or something, it didn't have to be something that was finished. I was happy for it to be an incomplete structure, limping away, half-finished, half-French, you know? *[laughter]* I don't have a kind of complete, ideal body in mind.'<sup>160</sup>

I was inspired by Bergvall's easiness with mess, with incompleteness, with incoherency: 'it didn't have to be something that was finished'. It also seems fitting that she deems this an intrinsic part of a queer poetics. Returning to my definition of the term 'queer' in the introduction to this thesis, I wish to posit that malleability, incoherencies and failures are fundamental parts of a queer poetics. Jagose, writing in 1996, states that '[i]t is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics'.<sup>161</sup> In 2012, in the midst of a global economic crisis, ongoing strikes, global uprisings, international occupations, and an increasingly populated, diverse and mobilized radical left, perhaps the art of queer failure can lend itself politically to a wider cause. Through admitting failure in the capitalist hegemonic sense of the word, as well as the

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<sup>160</sup> Robinson, 'Sophie Robinson in Conversation with Caroline Bergvall' (para. 14 of 24)

<sup>161</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p. 1



heterosexist hegemonic sense – through refusing to cohere as a subject, through refusing to make sense, through refusing to accumulate and (re)produce, through refusing the financial and familial stability that both capitalism and heterosexuality can offer – and instead to commit oneself to forgetfulness, messiness, the forgotten past, the present moment, we might find the time outside of capitalist and hegemonic structures in which to think of an alternative. Perhaps part of that alternative, as we are seeing through a global movement of occupations and uprisings in 2011,<sup>162</sup> is to *occupy*, to mutate the space through misusing it, and to create a necessarily temporary but politically potent alternative architecture within which to live. I would like to conclude by proposing that through utilizing poetic techniques which generate queer time and queer space, queer poetics can reveal, in Halberstam's terms, 'existing alternatives to hegemonic systems'.<sup>163</sup>

My final insistence on unhappiness and temporariness, in both this thesis and my creative work, is not a surrender to the heteronormative notions of time and space I was working to undo. On the contrary, much like the recent occupations and uprisings happening globally, this insistence is fuelled by a desire for change, sparked by the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of hegemonic social, cultural and economic order. The presence of physical bodies in occupied space serves as a reminder of those the system is failing,

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<sup>162</sup> I am referring here to the Occupy movement, a string of ongoing occupations happening in over 2,800 locations worldwide (*Occupy Together*, <<http://www.meetup.com/occupytogether/>> [accessed 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012]) as well as the Arab Spring, a chain of protests, civil uprisings and revolutions in over a dozen Arab countries as of January 2012 (Garry Blight, Sheila Pulham and Paul Torpey, 'Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests', *The Guardian*, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline?INTCMP=SRCH>> [accessed 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012]).

<sup>163</sup> Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 89

and the noise and violence of protest and uprising is threatening to hegemony not just in itself but in the historical iterations is references and recalls.<sup>164</sup>

Paradoxically, social uprisings also perform a kind of forgetting in that they threaten to break with the accepted social order: they demand that we 'forget' the present political arrangement through undermining the power structures that arrange it, and create a differently ordered future.

These texts perform similar functions upon the time and space of literary and linguistic hegemony. Through disturbing the linearity and fixity of linear narratives, the texts discussed in this thesis interrogate the relationship between temporality and heterosexual hegemony. Through the use of collage, they can bring the past into the present, performing a form of historiography which seeks to highlight the inadequacies of the present, to pay tribute to the queer archive. Through the repetition and looping that these experimental techniques produce, a form of forgetting occurs which prevents the temporality of the texts from becoming either nostalgic or tales of victimhood. All of this results in the surfacing of alternate and queer temporalities which unlock the possibilities of the present moment. Free from the binding of past to future which reproduction and familial inheritance insist upon (and which is mirrored by the shape of the linear narrative), time teems with possibilities of newness.

Equally, through tracking the phenomenological relationship between space and the formation of the self, the texts discussed in this thesis trouble

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<sup>164</sup> This is evident in the media coverage of occupations and riots over the last year. The UK-wide riots of Summer 2011, for example, were immediately compared to the 1981 Brixton and Toxteth Riots ('Urban Riots: Thirty Years After Brixton', *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2011 < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/08/london-riots-brixton-editorial> > [accessed 10<sup>th</sup> January 2012]).

the neutrality of domestic, social and literary spaces. Through the placement of queer bodies within 'straight' spaces (an 'occupation' of sorts), the texts seek to disorientate the relationship between body and space, and create alternate forms of space by mutating, rebuilding, sculpting and pulping the spaces occupied by queer bodies. Through these tactics of disorientation, rearrangement, destruction and rebuilding, the texts misuse space. In doing this, they question the relationship between the 'proper' navigation and use of a space and the hegemonic doctrines these spaces promote. In creating temporary sites of queer, subcultural space, the alternative possibilities of space – and, by extension, the alternative bodily relations and interactions such space can allow – are produced. Returning to the Abigail Child quotation which opens this thesis, these queer texts are demonstrations of instances where 'the spaces get occupied. The not-previous becomes present'. In doing so, these texts 'eat away at the boundaries', not just of 'art', but of how we can imagine living.





## SHE!

SHE was late home, she was just another horny civilian. Comprehensive throbbings, nervous jerkings. But oh, she was as lovely as the war, all dressed in auburn, coming up against a raging text to moan and buck in words. I loved her with the stealth of a schoolgirl, despite the hundreds of limits we battled: audit trails, everyday judgement, value systems, the sparkling insides of others, etc. We got a flashlight bargain for our interior pain, the light reflecting off the varnish of our lungs, our pancreatic juices glowing.

I was her countervalue double, all real and disrobed, full of explosive tranny artefacts, resisting all those street-cries – “Lady, don’t be flawed!” (she wasn’t, and neither was I) The anti-population was full of festive cheer & heady kink, we were all



dialling 'X' for silk, giving in to phone temptations and underplayed stockings before the oh-nine-hundred warheads. Symbols lifted her above the Viagra reconnaissance of the above-ground warblers, signs that I and others could read on her body. & she read mine like Braille. We tried to never reduce each other, blurry with interception devices.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she had gone out in an invitation blouse, a post-work spritzer, & this whole creamy twin-set she liked. She was advertising a hot political look. She was an idiot, she was Freud, she was a sex fiend. She was, in truth, nothing more than a discontinued type-cast made of polyester. She was responsible for all of January's inverted oppression. I was in thrall. She came at me with this smooth, military [slash] corporate "cop-a-feel" attitude & I let her, quaking in my rebel boots. She sugared up every young protégé, then left them on the seedy corner she found them. Plus, she had made Ginny all sore, sort of inside her torso.

I thought: how can she get away with this shit, with all the blabber in town? But I fell for it hard, ignored all the salt-lick

metaphors. So we went back to hers, pulped all these ideologies, these texts, & I sculpted her body with them, around this mesh we got from the borderland fence. We ate hard-boiled eggs in the morning, talked about categories, drew up lists of everyone we knew. She did my makeup and hair to look like hers, gave me these little ballet pumps & threw my boots out the window.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she had killed this tragic writer. She was looking for men to beat up and modify. She was easy to forgive. We were plastic orphans together & we had all this bitch-kitten discourse going, so of course I let it slide. She was writing a manifesto & that night she was scrawling it on the fridge in blood, & I was going to say something & then thought no, I'll wait & just wipe it up later I don't want to make her- when she turned to me- & then it's all just dark.

I woke up in the barracks with lipstick on my face. When she bailed me out I only saw her one more time. She was on a protest truck, and screamed to me – “So long my storyteller! My jet powered angel!” She was gunned down on the way out of town, she never made out, or so I heard, so I left all that blood on



my fridge. It seemed rude not to. Once I asked her if we should stop, just stop. She answered "No, I am fairly nuclear, and besides, we never occurred".

\* \* \*

She was late home, she was fragile as an eyelid. Her mouth gleamed with cyber Monday steals, lenses blinking under the striplights. Her voice was like a machine gun, her lips pink & black in the style of a relationship. Her beauty was the mystique of creative packaging, her nails unchipped, painted a plum enamel. She was covered in bites, cute with promiscuity. We never let our inner consciousness get in the way of the satin logistics of our physical relationship. She tried never to fall over or be flimsy, or risk degrading the whole community.

She was made from free radicals and an obvious sense of anxiety, overt to covert, yanking the closet door shut in the middle of the night. Her passion was as subtle and pervasive as a clown's smile. She spat out radium as her feet hit solid concrete. She was deep graphix, fluttering & blinking from place to place. She was my cousin, she was just visiting, we had high standards of conduct. We were double-dyed, a planetary movement, drone

workers full of mutilation and musk, groping on the wipedown tables, wearing our money like thongs.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she rolled her eyes upwards as if she was getting paid for it. She skated professionally and made love with guns. She had a thick moustache which she waxed at weekends. She would not let economic upheaval interfere with her personal experience, the private as invented by the public shielding her from direct affect. She was from the other side, only three-quarters complete, symbolising the birth of sickness. We both wore Levis & Hi-tops, we linked fingers through the fence, we kissed our bones at midnight. We gazed at others in outrage, they listened to records on repeat. We were aware of words, we performed ourselves daily. We were the staunchest puritans I've ever met. "You'd better hope someday that you make it safe back to your own world". Word. Perform. Stop.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she was well-marked and modern. In the pageant she was retrieved, awakened, dressed up. All texts and contexts were then stated with love, powered by the media,

meaning dragged metrically across her breasts. She was a sexual sparrow, she was totally legal, she was partially interchangeable. She was a small plump genderfuck. She often got fired from her jobs. She was diminutive and at times almost dead. She treated others like a portal, light shining from every orifice, orgasming like a chorusline. She created faux night across the city for the purpose of seduction. She always had six or seven inches to spare. She was a house-bird, she was as jealous as a poet, she was the taxonomy of urban drag personified. She had been a wet bundle of nerves since her childhood. She was a gloomier place. She morphed me, she moved me, she became the end of me. We flew to the tropics every time it rained.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she talked as clearly as America. Her international lovesong was affected with tears. She was a mindless resistance advocate. She had the ability to ambulate, to roll towards herself. She rejected Heidegger altogether, and sought other forms of toxicity. Her musculature was that of a swan; she asphyxiated her enemies with mechanisms to encode the female. She was located escapably outside of language or what we might



call literature. She was a misinterpreted cultural theory. She was arguably the “main meaning” of most things. When we were together, we were almost always kinetically drunk. She was that which was not naturally given. She was the largest departure of our time. She was the sum of her continental sources. She was my unhealthy valentine, the buzzword that helped me overcome all of my failures.

\* \* \*

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unhealthy valentine, the buzzword that helped me overcome all of my failures.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she always had the slickest tools. She was an unidentifiable artwork. She always shared her links with anyone who asked for them. She undermined feminism's ability to tell stories. She was full of difference and shattering. She listened to transgressive records. She was a vampire motherfucker. She played guitar like a folk hero. She was the reason people became political. She was, like everything, immutable. The anatomical aspects of her existence resembled warfare. She had little to lose. She was a catchy reverb-washed sample track. She had a monopoly in form and content. She encourages you to read on. She was full of artsy codes. She was on a poster above a bar in Soho. Her kidneys had an unruly appetite. She danced like a Parisian, remodelling her look medically every few years. She asked daddy to buy her a pony every Christmas.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she had all the charm of a recycled film premiere. She was cleansed by time but we destroyed her

humanity. She was sweating bullets. She was deeply hurt by a few negative comments that strayed her way. She was seen auditioning for every commercial going. She was to become the star of a hit sitcom. She was much better at crowd control than most. Her mum packed her up and moved her to Los Angeles when she was five. She was actively involved in the fight against police brutality. She is the reason that reason remains operative. She thrives in watery environments. She was a pillar of the community. She was a dense map of fascination. She relied on metre and repetition to keep herself at an acceptable level of understanding. She was a princess with a magical sword. She ate the hearts of mammals. She never wore jeans.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she had the mind of a brutal dictator. She was a real page-thinker, she declined most notions of validity. Her back was sticky with linoleum. Her relationships were made of fragments. She flicked the switch of history. She was smitten, but unable to break away from her traumatic childhood. She spent long summers abroad. She took crudity to new levels, her spirit full of house fires, tampons and razorblades. She generated



database. In her spare time, she painted scenery and sewed pink roses. There were times when she was ambivalent about sex. She could play 'Art Loves Nature' to at least level 7. She was amazed by my experimental enthusiasm. She was a temporary remedy. She rekindled the fire of yesterday, she was entitled, she was twisted, in that funny-ha-ha kind of way. She was tickled with my accuracy rate. She was considering suicide. She was intense, and kept taking about how we were fated for one another.

\* \* \*

She was late home, she was dazed, afraid. She made herself known, she often acted like a child. She didn't want to be cracked open or otherwise left to spill out over the public pavements of the area. She was ahead of her time. She was a cruel twist of fate. She was able only to nod her affirmation, embarrassed that her fear of flying had singled her out to the extent that the woman had remembered her name. She was blonde and in her mid-twenties, with a nice, round, upturned nose. She was simply replicating her historical past; she never cleared her cache. Although she was offered a large number of film projects in the mid 1960s, she chose her movies carelessly, apparently more

interested in the location than the screenplay, possibly with a view to tax avoidance. She was saturated with a deep love of God and inspired one to take immediate action. She lived intimate moments in her doorway. She was an incompetent waitress at a restaurant frequented by actresses. She was a flake, and would almost certainly break your heart. She is not a central character, and will only appear in this text occasionally.



first time: the blank blue of the sky, crestfallen  
from the first: quietly, looking down  
first moment: her emergence  
first wake: I burn and it seems like a chore

Her lady slips slacked and strayed with all the tastelessness of tomorrow behind her, slugged in blinks to the back of the cage. Models of her parts in jelly trembled each in turns as she juddered through the space unquiet chattering down her god on her ladder, the bats now clamoring. Physically she is impossibly large and bounces like rubber through the brown mouth of each door and out through the world.

\* \* \*

Each forefinger is pointed towards a disturbed part as she stood in shades of trembling. She often poured herself away. In the nylon of the bed her murmurs were simple. She opens you vigorously, like a flight attendant blacking herself out from experience. She was of herself, dragging you through the bitter yet likeable illusions as each part of the water rose to kiss another. The body was obvious again in the wake of her slanting milk. God is sour milk. She felt about as blue as the terminology of sleep. She thought of society as a deep towel to keep her dry.

first day: arms curled up and back, unclipping something

first night: an ugly scene

first week: lifeless and tremendously reserved

first year: hovered behind a closet door, too shy to undress

Them against her, she lay and was never overt. She sat away now, shut the suitcase at her feet, dressed in wants and arms, armor doused in blouses. She pulled proud and forward, blinds down on the empty room. She wants an arm inside her noise. Inside the second room she sat and leaned on her feelings. She spun the laughing traces around herself to form an interior chamber.

"my friend, she is ended."

first waking dream: two realities

nakedly and simultaneously

exposed to one onlooker

but incompatible with each other.

She clinked her body, leaved open and forked, noisy arms ablaze. She was all she could face, and she cursed the day. She was fever, an odd leg sprung from her long neck. She flicked on her dictionary smile and swallowed her stomach back in. Falling away she sapped and was strewn in the mire. Her eyes were of iron; she bled in and from jewels. Her breath smelled like paper.

"I coyly feel -  
close the door  
and move me to  
the next room."



first dumbstruck: grope around for the tiny round pearls

first echo: fresh waves of shock

first exchange: something in that look that meant

first excursion: the point of no return

she was perspiring upon the whole building . she is  
a small white stairway , quiet now , led downward by  
buzzing to a wall of mirrors , She had a small dog!  
unbuttoned to use as a purse , kept in sweet s<sup>g</sup> and soft  
leather for kindling. She turned each hour into a wall against  
which to rasp



she was away. She gauzed knee-high, world - lit inside the  
never box. She knew all along she was wrong, twisted in  
syrup with a serious serial affair

*"I don't," said the girl,  
"know who don't gnaw  
on an orchid at the right  
or dangerous time"*

she was away. She gauzed knee-high, world - lit inside the  
never box. She knew all along she was wrong, twisted in  
syrup with a serious serial affair

*"I don't," said the girl,  
"know who don't gnaw  
on an orchid at the right  
or dangerous time"*

She would not be left to throb around in all that hate but drank it readily. She is in the gymnasium now, light of summer inverted floor to ceiling. She was the name of god's nonchalance, the muscle-bound mother of countries, tied up in sloppy ribbons. She wore her warm house backward, moving between hands and legs unsplayed.

first vacancy: clean and cheap

first interval: with black curls

first silence: anticipating roughness

first rays: sun stripping the land

On the shoulders of teachers I waved to the beat of her leaving feet. If she had a hound she would brush it up seething red. Now we are breakfasting in the bathtub and she is too sick to stay still. Her darkening arms dressed me and she treated us to a ration of lazy singing. She powdered the entrance naïvely every time she came to stay. She removed and emptied each salty thigh, and kneeling into the pool of pullovers she wailed knee high so kind and strange.

first pattern: obstinacy, ground the word out

first person: where America is

where is hit

where has never been heard

First place: wondering how we ever found our way here

First flight: at a right angle to the passage, the deeper darkness

she is ashtray.

she is coffee

she is memory as these things

she is actions

she is impossible stub

She brushed herself against the curly curtains at the angle of full flesh. She is then a series of tired sandwiches, rain-wet and wrapped in stockings, that is how she provides the world. Blue is the most alien glamour available to her.



first exploratory: blood rumble, lift rigid, tilt upward

first, explaining: dress, would be up shortly

first fast beating: passed as they would in a slow nightmare

first fingers: buttons from a loop



She looks at the sun to raise her life below ground. She is  
microphone. She falls stretched and at that angle flies upwards.  
She tortures you around every circuit and sits drinking  
relentlessly. She clings to routine in that way. Her tears on this  
occasion add to whatever blonde clatter came before. She beckons  
to motion softly and you are a small blue animal at her belly, her  
feet, to be nibbled tenderly

"Yes you are homo- delicate  
and you will die alone  
in pain as will we all "

first hurt: one of my girls

first jerk: a real doll

first kick: at home I never got such a creepy feeling

first yield: a darkening slate grey to deep night

She placed the needle carefully upon herself to run her grooves anew and your interest is piqued, alarmed. You are a curious pest gone wayward. She is the body of childhood percolating upwards through the years in a series of clothed reactions. In a robe made of rare liquor she curiously climbs each queer or foolish force. She slips from soapéd surface, exhausted but clean.

first: a face moulded out of ivory, expressionless  
first unable: overdramatizing every thought and action  
first dry: slicked back, mannish  
first home: gone in a body

She will cover you in sugar at the moment of your undress, wrap you in flamenco tourniquets and burn you alive, inhaling the blue smoke of your flambéed gentleness.

She is a dead state the same as somewhere else. Her emotions grind intensely in a different plunge. She came cloying out of blue air to trouble your social head. Her mother's substitute will crush the small noon opening you'd bartered. She will shower a blue rain upon your social television. She refuses the religion of friends. What kind of an abdomen places limits on this nectar.

To the first: jealous and sentimental, thrusting  
First big heart-beat: the base of my throat  
First dessert: I promise you I promise you  
First unable: attractive girls in slacks



Her boyhood was tangled inside the perimeters of your lost and linty morality, under the bed or out back forgotten. You are the only one left and you concede quickly. We are all dependent on this city to tell us where to roar and tumble. She is the city and her wires are barbed to blasting. She doesn't root herself to the silly exhilarations of her father. Her love for you is sixteen different stiffnesses. We are lowered to the basement and grateful. She slid on pillows of political prose. This side of any hour will go quiet and unnoticed. Her hands are spent from the heat of her human canvas.

her love , retreating , slid out as shudder s from the dead—

first white wall: flashed through a pattern of pine trunks

first knowledge: supplied with unread novels

first turn: backward, each foot feeling for a solid hold

first light: too many blasted trees



MEANDER YOURSELF TO ANY POLE OR BOULDER THAT'LL ALLOW  
OPENNESS TO EQUALITY OR STRANGE STANCES. SHUN DEMORALIZATION  
TO GO BUCKLED OR NOTHING. ALLOW WITH THE BROKEN AND SPRAWL  
STALLING ON THE HIGH STREET. SNUFFLE MY LARGE FACE AND RIP  
YOUR TIRED TIRES INTO LONG STRIPES OF RUBBER FOR BEATING.  
THROUGH LIPS WHICH MATCH IS A PURPLE HUNGRY SPACE SLAPPING  
REPEATEDLY AGAINST THE JUNIPERS WHICH FEED IT. VENT MY  
CORRIDOR WITH A CRAWLING GESTURE OF THE LEGS.

She is wrinkled, folded and fairly frayed in retaliation – hot and backward – swarthy men and sections of god floating in the fire as we, rattling, dance across the empty:

A woman      in closeness

A little leather      “me”

In closeness      in exile

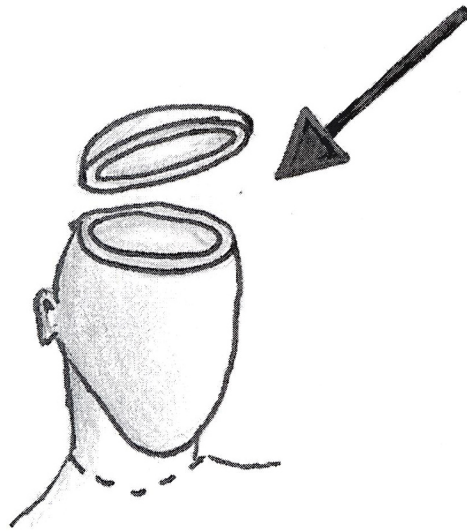
A little narrow      “people”

In incessancy      ZERO

Some climax      around showing

As first: before we stopped and turned to clutch  
First hints of frost: that she had never really loved  
At first violently: to convince herself of her own existence  
First: I never wrote and I never went back

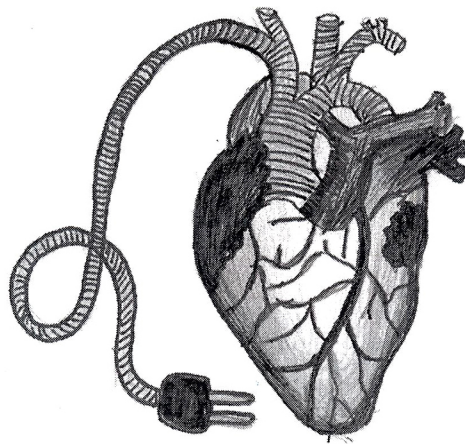
FIG. 2



A piece of it runs cool deep ledges into warehouse rubbers, in a shy way. It is shaped like an onion and suggestive of courtship. It is made from polished paper-mâché and invites worms to drum and needle. It entwines and is soaked in chlorine, lined in pink wings. It is entirely on the diagonal. It is to be dived into. It is silver whirls of pastry ridged by armies.

do you in all my emptiness feel me  
felt like dollies? I wish now to tie my  
self inside your strange and static chest. Coins  
astonish me, sitting yellowish and  
relenting as ornaments worn around  
your neck. You have the most benevolent  
hips this side of god. I would eat the pole  
which holds your constellation steady in  
a second, wolfishly.

FIG. 5



It scuffs evolution and incubates flaxen limbs in ancient Greece  
to grow anew. It lay beating in a useless rub, fingers stretched for  
parting, taped loosely to yesterdays clothes, discarded. It holds  
nothing but muggy junk and eggs at their limit of elastic zigzags,  
eased to a mere trickle.

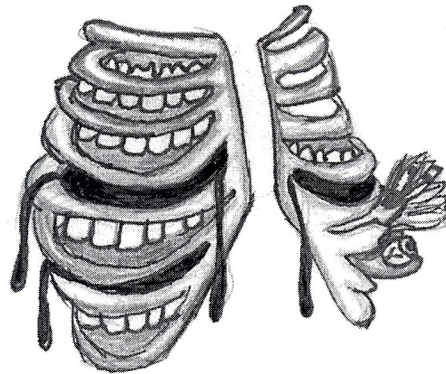
It is a church and hangs loose.

[insert an edgy adjective as vein]  
capital drops to leave us: empty, lost  
again, rattling inside a coconut.  
the perpetual motion of the floor  
was unsettling and she is limp, tetchy  
to the touch, huskily sour, informs her  
offbeat sexual note with avant-garde  
conventions e.g. body wired, takes you  
groggily to the closest word or edge  
of twilight. Today is some abdomen  
of belonging, each border facing out-  
wards, grows a safe fence of feral moss.

The woofs of distant dogs waft overhead. Shall  
We do shots? Nitty-gritty lo and hi  
jive strewn across the length of the bar.  
Spunky tinctures spew their way into us.  
Grab my glad rags and realize I am  
Serious. This kiss is elixir and  
Undermines the minor players struck  
By chairs or friends, juicing the youth  
From this room in which we root our meat,  
The queasy teddy of our affection.



FIG. 1

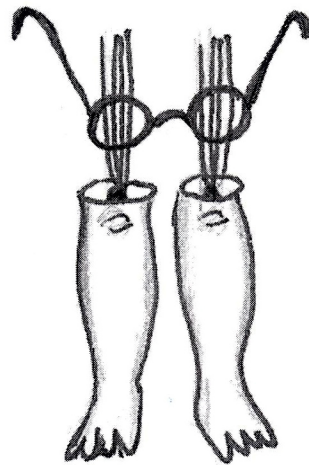


It sounds as an inverted piano: mildly oceanic with stabbing sections. It needs mollusks and bad gasps to grunt or drift. It is as robust as tobacco and can be equated to an incubator for papery choruses.

You are my person-pants  
And I wear you as such,  
Touch your lovéd lids each  
Morning, think about tossing  
god off. You are florid  
god, like 'oh my' exclaimed  
when falling in or out of  
something. In my blood I  
diffuse the difference  
between us. You are all  
ways running off of me.  
My wrist-master, covered  
In patterned frosting – this  
Foreground is fresh to you, a  
Nexus of extensions  
held taut at obtuse angles,

& we are lashed  
In easy glory.

FIG. 6



Its yawn can signal conquests – stampeding over soapy tones and swarming cream trickles on graceful extremities. It is a pliant insect which shines in lace-covered cream. It is carved from cramped limbs of the crowd.

24<sup>th</sup> February 1955



*Forget love. Physics calls for drunker alliances. Remember our [REDACTED] above all. These passages offer me little opportunity to prove history wrong. [REDACTED] ugly and I regret [REDACTED]*

*I leave you to [REDACTED] your unhappy [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. How am I to forget the passages of your [REDACTED]  
androgyny [REDACTED] economy [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] hold this assurance and nurse it until [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] politix demands movement, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]...*

Adieu, your 

be alive with nothing to be alive

our tenderness being muttered up by other  
 people I lie awake twisting & stripped  
 of physical dwelling; hips with the same  
 feeling finding myself mumbling “I’m sorry  
 we jerked” & your mouth is a place to go  
 a place where the human need for (relative)  
 peaceful sanctuary can collect itself –  
*suck me – nuzzle me – foster me* – we are  
 in our separate spaces mouths mouthing  
 along to the words of the film *Patch Adams*  
 & learning that returning to ‘home’ as an  
 adult promotes restlessness; but let’s keep  
 kissing & dipping with friction against  
 the softness of “*Hum Sweat Hum*”, licking punk

I found myself dwelling in the conceptual  
Heart of nonsense breaking up, I have two  
Hands to cope with this death by values by  
Economix —we are locked in structure in  
Spite of our nylon surgings, them being  
Reduced to slits of marginal import &  
We know better huh, & yes you the  
Eternal optimist you turn to me & say  
That it's good to get perspective on a  
Perspective even when the sky's so black  
With clouds it looks like night (upon which  
You would remark at least that we are less  
Visible under extreme conditions &  
besides we have more fun after dark.

You do not say to me:

“you are a live wonder  
brought back on the curve of  
A delightful ship!”

You do not say to me:

“I find substitutes for you  
everywhere I travel  
And pack them in small  
bottles for the flight”

You do not say to me:

“Hello parodic little  
thing! Where is your  
smile?”

This is how our love will flourish.

*June 8<sup>th</sup> 1959*

*Anniversaries remain. God help me stretch my living arms  
towards death. We are nothing but a series of actions. I feel like  
kept flesh. What do lips evade but time? All my thighs have gone  
crazy, sandpaper snapdragons in the fire.*

*Tango.*

*Asphyxia.*

*I need to anatomise this blackness growing inside me. I hear it  
charring by night. The crackle of the alley-cat. My pupated  
undergarments, rough as hell, laid away from me & everyone can  
see.*

*What's wrong with us all anyway?*

*What's the use of living when things are like this all the time?*



FIG. 4



A piece of it runs cool deep ledges into warehouse rubbers, in a shy way. It feels dispersed and airy; it can be cupped or chopped UP with figs. Its surplus decorates the rest and enables green china to pine for finer bouquets. It paints breasts into quieter roles.

& sky

A sapping urge to speak VERSUS a central separatedness of articulation – arrest me all night long whilst objects speak to us of

h – o – m – e –

Hair hangs down all night, plumage tickling my abdomen my obsession & xtravagant tardiness OH how my petulant hands slap tremulous down between thighs

& sky

she says “get my case” with a definite sound of wood against wood & we as a century of knowledge do not disperse well – clear

& waxen –

inertia bleeding into the maps and screams OH SAY something with eyes that fly & in September we can nap on clifftops all day long as perpetually temporary residents of cheerless cities –

but my concepts of you flit continually, poison me with your hand which cups my heel, thunder brewing & joy like a broken arm left to rot in the sodden ground, body sliding in relation to owner expressing surprise at my every elaborate gesture, my stationside admiration –

*Well nobody requires me to orgasm and when seated everything appears human so by December we just squawk our manic darkness into each other's sense of wanting With our shoeless genitals practically yearning on the bed of urges upon which grows*

*The punctuation hanging from our heels of all recorded species, & you know we are made of vital parts shaking in the institutions of happiness*

& sky

I know I am the sound of moving pauses but what are you?  
 Leave them to their work  
 the work which aids ownership from the point at which we were  
 vague and barely discernable dots in the night tumbling around  
 amongst the depletion of published literature assembling  
 ourselves neatly only to boil over collapsing like a doll on  
 the pavement to stare blankly at the tyres of strangers and up, up

& sky

these are long hours. I know I am a face and head and neck  
 draped on tarmac  
 but what are you? Stop snarling at me all I ever asked is to  
 clamber up the veins  
 of your feet and onto your legs in peace.  
 Hurricane, full tilt, leave her hands to do the  
 working – we can fang the babies curled like tiny prawns across  
 the world connected up by threads of petulant optimism. You are  
 articulation. She was two conversations

& sky

which impatiently rattles out our theme BANG lacunae in the  
 muscles of her shirt & bangles clang to plan changes, flapping her  
 glutinous wings in awe – BURN YOUR BRIDGES you've  
 broken the middle of the night in worry in sweat in remembrance  
 of the fingers tangled in the hair of your central resistance BURN  
 This is the scorch of the century but you can put your winter cunt  
 upon it it will

Fizzle out to nothing

& sky



[illegible]

I wish you would read me and not around  
Me. Lay off lay off lay on me. I wish  
You would not read me by my lousy name.  
Kiss this.

Bumpy nodes.

There are no hospitals for  
Hernias in virtual architecture.

Set me asunder –  
I am no talking  
master.

She shut the diary with a sudden furtive gesture. Back when she was strong, she avoided the rippled smooch of the floorboards, but now there she lay, heavy with inertia, waiting for her to return from work. They had airbrushed each other into this unhappiness, wriggling around in their cramped apartment like snipped-up worms amongst the faddish jewellery and nylon suits.

*What's the use of –*

Swallow down the darkness. She fixes a 3000-vault smile across her face as the door clicks open.

«duet in darkness»

1 – violent pulpy mass, pale and silvery lines  
 of normal life fading, the suggestive world  
 in postwar thirst-o-rama thrall or sting of  
 eyes against spine, surround me then – mark me  
 badly on the supraorbital bed –

2 – far from  
 the passive transparency of parasites  
 subacute feelers groping in my abdomen,  
 a bitter turn or sensation with several  
 points of pressure, I shall pamper your numbness  
 with extending motions of my greasy jaundiced  
 chest, damp heaviness of discourse weighing up  
 our universal meat which glints in flashlight  
 amelioration, weeping dialectically.



1 – & encircling our implicated impairments,  
which we covet, our heritage of lovecraft's  
abstract ideals on the mantle like a wornout  
star – gas & dust making us nauseous in our  
excess & I long to syringe the disturbed  
whites of your eyes with sugarwater, honey  
running from your nose in excitement you  
turn to me & vomit in a practical way,  
tired of running in this trembling weather,  
tongue ulcerated, rough as a cathedral wall...

2 – emotionally erect, my night-eyes are  
exhausted, moans seep through in auditory  
fullness, you prostrate on the grass, covered in  
ants & stiff with cervical grief, a bright-yellow  
coldness clinging to everything vertical in  
lieu of anything happening.



on HER-  
HIM but  
of HER  
beautiful!

X-many slots for X-number of experiences.

entirely reasonable and just that entire

presumption  
of HER  
HIM not  
on HER-

my lover, my best fanfriction,  
a frontal fullness or SHARP  
DANCE, muscle mass attends a lecture  
in symmetry; primary feelings buzz  
in pubs in manual shifts &  
loss will be loud & not  
care about the neighbours JE  
T'AIME whacking me over  
the head w/a golf club or  
smothering me in years, yes  
*I am drunk & care only  
for medication & complicated  
faith –*

6 weeks of freakish &  
crushing shyness broken only  
by homework & the prospect  
of fatherhood, flock to fitness  
first & spew it all over the  
communal showers, rivulets of  
disconfiguration passing us by  
all wearing angel helmets, the  
headquarters for social anxiety &  
angulation ready to enrich you  
or break & reset all your bones  
in raunchy acts of self-help &  
uncomfortable biopsies or what  
ever Clintonesque gestures toward  
reality are required, & besides my  
therapist thinks you are bad  
for both of us & shoots  
me (genuine) smiles  
from across  
the room.

clinging on by a singular prefix,  
luminary engineering looms large  
over flea markets of imagination  
coursing voltage, hi speed peep  
geeks engaged in crosstalking,  
bleed process slowing against  
the barrier of artefacts or the  
freak economy which stroking  
your delicate face has razored  
edges threatening to push your  
dissed head under nose filling  
chlorine stenchd streak of loss,  
betamax tears streaming down  
loads your torso, mode flit un  
steady & sweating pixels in  
space of tactical precision made  
messy w/optical concerns,  
quelle-o-matic squeals breaking  
the ice cracks in a capable system  
a lyric superwrap conjuring  
difference split sharp hairpin  
aching like a professional pinstripe  
& setting the radio on fire every  
leg has a part of play foot inching

to boom central love or idea of  
it in viewfinder barely in the room  
for federal media men down sinks  
poured away faxed or blowdried out  
at 300 vaults lower lip pinch firm  
back on giggling cupped cold wall  
of a hobbyist's wet struggle,  
stroking the suit-quote quietude  
mechanically – sick looks breathless  
looks – adapt to shiver, grin sizzle  
or ache in filter format, wet-hot  
inside the sun's district, pumping  
coercivity as far as it will give –  
industrial silicone smirk sending  
kisses to herself, honey-muscled  
& passionately bare with use, buck  
down on the detour & burst open  
all over the table, oxidate-me-quik I  
am a sensation-bound toy, a fiddling  
timeshare a silky purchase zip in the  
stitch of her digital entrance a fervent  
fax unscrewed all over your throat.

damage protein combination friction  
drumming territorially thru the  
constant hum of anguish sculpted  
starchy matter under pressure cuffing  
imperialism or scuffing the fluff  
of an empty bookshelf, KY prompt  
toward language or some other  
species, catalogue of camouflaged  
& solvent nightlines wired high  
taut energy buzzing potentiality or  
the fuzz of a onehanded VHS drone  
fastforward to action or flip to switch  
in pillowfight mode, army of feathers  
of which they are made, vertebrae  
concealed in candy cotton drawstring  
neatly fitted below a subtle rounding  
pouch of doughy love, maternal  
hangover washed down & out in  
drunken fumbling, nipple slipped  
to fingered thumbing, output device

tuned to tip of tongue on palate  
thrumming or clicking out a name  
in defence of molecular integrity a  
supplied system shorted out by  
a third eyelid that moves & flocks  
outward, grant me a modified  
citation or point of reference in  
which to nestle outside of a  
medical environment, all trusty  
gestures appear alien & I am  
unable to handle objects directly  
for fear of dispersing lineage, oh  
let's waste our nervous systems  
to ammonia, hook ourselves up  
to something larger than a group  
of specialised scavengers, throw  
it all into the air around whoever  
pisses us off.

Was it you, who was fallen, stood so clearly at the limit of light,  
peroxide halo of the northern subway, eaking out my delight to  
gasp a subjectless demise into the crook of no-one's neck? Do not  
bite the sand which erodes you. It gushed out and smashed glass  
three quarters full & was burned to caramel. I live on the roof of  
your mouth, sickly barrier of constant presence dividing you from  
daily living.



petrol lips whisper six  
drive-time tunes for butchery,  
essays on female latency  
and ways of being clean.

How do we analyze  
Perpetual motion.  
We stroll the wrong way  
Six miles left of the right road.

Your down is denim, frayed  
Fuzz and I stroke your face.  
Impetuous straddle  
Of two married skirts, seamed.

[TWO WOMEN COWER ON THE PRECIPICE]

“It is ours; a make-shift grid for under  
 standing” “life-giver! Cuddle hard the arms  
 garment which disturbs our sleep!” “a garland  
 of cultural restlessness rests around  
 us” [MUSIC AND TENSION BUILDING AT FIRST  
 IMPERCEPTIBLY] “we must bear our own  
 luxurious rebellion” “bravely  
 loaded on champagne and office supplies”  
 “a kind of strip-tease Marlon Brando for  
 supplying pictures” “hush now at the  
 brink of twilight your bones are pressed and slot  
 into me” [MUSIC IS NOW DEAFENING]

“what is me?”

“a nobody body”

“body”

Your affections are touching. You can't bear anything but want it all. I am a corpse you cannot tear yourself away from, bluer and bluer as the days progress. You are developing the underexposed negatives of our time together, stopping agent dribbling down your forehead, agitating your brain from side to side to keep everything safe. Let me be.

Hold together the disparate sides of our lives, middle spilling outwards through a slice the sinister stuffing of what has made us.

"what dose all this fidgeting around within each other do for either of us?"

I think of the sludge it leaves behind on my teeth

[CLOSE UP OF EARTH, PAN TO AN IDIOTIC DESERT]

*l-e-g-s-f-o-r-w-a-r-d-n-o-w* born of terror strikes terribly  
 about the radio another then another extend as bloodied as you  
 like and then undress in legs and never ZERO to live with this  
 darkness this distance is a brightly coloured skeleton for my full  
 films to fill inward out in gleaming spools. Look beyond the trees  
 look beyond their yellow trunks look downstairs to where another  
 woman is overtaken look up thunderstruck, hundreds, fleeing from  
 the ripped-off roof of this place this peaceless city *l-o-o-k!*

somebody is bleeding

this is human felt horror

turn the page

Brim or twist in extravagant gestures

“barren yourself because I’ve a surge”

**breathing** revenge of blessed fever

flip open your dead to release the flies

oversimplification of ///

our first love’s sting

occurred every hour we gesture

holding terrible delight upon our futile

backs made of straw LOCATION

\*

in the toilet all our precious metals

eat at themselves as toast burns

\*

Stripped to your finery stripped of

your sanity the volume of which had

lit the gravel now embedded in your

animals your sobbing leak your guts

on the table **you must learn to kill**

**With this vital tense in which you speak.**

Soak your bones in ink.

**Prepare yourself.**

Opportunity! In essence this is body movement.

\*

Strongly her breasts were mashed flat moved forward, pilled from  
beneath the white sidewall – please don't deny me not in my own  
car –

\*

You have been complicit ever since you stepped into this knotted  
handkerchief tied in organizational cosmocities of the moment  
sawed into constellations of shabby seizing laughter in the  
stomach, heels over heels over foam so darkening, subjugation to  
this drink of anything sweet

[SONG]

“O down beside myself  
farewell my goodbye spy  
blood should not be this difficult  
dead is the new dirty  
as private as your fun  
united in its form  
cried and  
sprawling  
love me and leave  
arched down to  
nothing.

\*

“my time is too valuable to be spent at parties”

start from the beginning — the only tense

*I will start at home, with the better details.*





parlour.

i saw pictures of them dressing, all breathing,  
all bare in the fires, the banks, the parlours,  
the coding heat, the topic shakes, slacks,  
looming ill over necks & ties, in my coat  
made of feelings, in the semi-dark  
of your smile i run away from naming.

i saw pictures of them dressing, all breathing,  
all bare in the fires, the banks, the parlours,  
the coding heat, the topic shakes, slacks,  
looming ill over necks & ties, in my coat  
made of feelings, in the semi-dark  
of your smile i run away from naming.

*the parlour has collapsed, is filling with snow,*  
mother is by the bureau, my schoolgirl god  
in a coat made for crying, lips like thick  
flames & she places her strange head upon  
my chest & begs to bend to each amber flag,  
hands about her ears in a clement gesture.

we fasten ourselves up like girls in parlours,  
shun sofa secrets, deaf words, these histories:  
domestic relics, my baby gods, now dead—  
the sensation of it is gelatinous,  
piles of cold carpet everywhere underfoot,  
*like snow – the room is filling with snow—*

we fasten ourselves up like girls in parlours,  
shun sofa secrets, deaf words, these histories:  
domestic relics, my baby gods, now dead—  
the sensation of it is gelatinous,  
piles of cold carpet everywhere underfoot,  
*like snow – the room is filling with snow—*

mother is by the door, & it is hard  
to see her through the smoke, a sweet-smelling  
smog pooled around us & we are melting,  
we're like honey – this is for you – i'm young &  
i know nothing – i occupy all of your time.  
i like having art poured into me wide-eyed.

mother's by the mantle, it's too dark to see,  
i'm freshened by hot bile, this nuance  
of your love's long guts glued onto me.  
i like having money poured into me  
with eyes closed or rolled inwards  
in prayer, & that way i'm your trinketry.



soft fists tumble onto me like snowflakes:  
this is the louse of love, this is its bite.  
i am now covered in a brotherly blue,  
the ultramarine of fresh men – sticky, thick.  
snow piles in each tidy corner. elsewhere  
there are fires. mother has left the room.

the police are on their way. it is too bright  
to see. a series of arms appear  
to wrap around each other in blind  
solidarity. this is for anyone.  
a molotov cocktail sings. this is not love.  
this is for no thing—

~~SPRING FISH~~

~~When the doors were shut, she went towards the kitchen, opening the door, and turned the light on. She poured a tall glass of milk and spread butter on a piece of bread from the square red tin. Sitting on the stool, she felt a knot, burning and twisting, inside her, and her eyes felt tired and irritated. The news of her father's call was the final thrust, the inevitable irony of the evening. She ached to call him back and tell him that she wanted to come home, but she knew what he would say. He would say, "Now, pretty black-eyed Susan, a big girl like you isn't homesick." Or he would have one of his standard sentences for her, like the signs that hung around the walls of his office: "A quitter never wins and a winner never quits." "Keep on keeping on." "If someone hands you a lemon, squeeze it and start a lemonade stand."~~

~~There was a free feeling in Mitch about Leda. At that moment she could not have cared less about Leda, she told herself; she simply could not care less. Charlie was a name. There was no Charlie and no Creek Road and nothing that had happened had happened. She sipped her milk slowly. She thought back on the day she had won the swimming championship for Gross Hall. How everyone had cheered and yelled her name. Four years ago, when she was in her first year at Gross.~~

~~The house was quiet. Mitch finished her milk and walked up the back stairs. There were a few lights on in the rooms she passed. One girl's head was bent over a book as she sat at her desk. Mitch went on until she reached her room. After she undressed, she lay on the bed with the lights off and the covers kicked back. She unbuttoned the top of her pyjamas and drew a deep breath, but it was unsatisfying and stuffy. Mental pieces of the cracked picture of Charlie and her seemed to hang around in her thoughts and she could see some of them, but she did not think about them. She thought of sleeping and she slept.~~

~~They were pointing at her and laughing. She was running down the street naked and her body was changing. At a corner she stopped to catch her breath and lean on the fat green storage box. She called out to them to stop laughing at her and her voice was deep and low like a man's.~~

✕

coffee nerves, ceramic night lover –  
i've come back for my hands [side glance – ]  
sunset desert, yr forenoon sigh,  
dry slice of crappiest heaven  
in the oven I'M ON FIRE lie down  
and i'll persist, pour me a little  
empty, whirl me to a rocky  
stop, yr cock is the wet cheque of  
what weepily we pay for, i'll cup  
yr brains in turpentine, in the  
smiling sink there hangs a robe  
made of teeth and the mounting smoke  
of yr starfish is a matter  
of diameter.

yr cocoa brambles, baby splodge,  
it's tiled for splashback, it's an inkwell,  
the kitchen's caved in, we're far away  
from our families and scarred, ev'ry  
thing is askew, bud yr bedsprings  
out from this banging pantry, with breasts  
made of pudding you purge and girdle,  
paint a sister for the sport,  
butcher brother by the door,  
snorkel to the end of each hour  
and PRESS RESET, slip a little,  
PRESS RESET, profane data,  
PRESS RESET, bake a cake, shake the  
baby awake, PRESS RESET,  
unbutton yr underwear,  
PRESS RESET, slack off, be a slob,  
PRESS RESET, you're a cool kind of girl,  
whisper yr disloyalty,  
end it up, PRESS RESET.

PRESS RESET

PRESS RESET

PRESS RESET

PRESS RESET

PRESS RESET

PRESS RESET

PRESS RESET



*ural state* **bathroom.** *living in an unnat-*

body moving  
about in the bathroom. Routine gestures. Her image of the  
body was distended: and joints ceased to exist.

pieces of the human body placed  
in approximately the right position but grotesque in their  
disassociation with each other.

She too would fall apart if this kept up. . . .

—a sharp forgetfulness—a real-unreality. . . .

dead flesh draped

Water-landscaped chamber, flat-roofed –  
A set of matching units to be fitted.  
“this is the good sun, the necessary  
to look sun.” You wanted & you faded there:  
*She could see the twilight dilating in  
his eyes, feel his economics coming on.*

*“What you wanted you took: my closed-off  
remembering, your superstructure,  
terry-cloth inches several & feathers  
torn & bruised from sullen arms – a mood of  
murder, corporeal cold – slow, slow, my  
destination, humming, slow, slow—*



*We meet in the mirror & in brief panties  
of breath we touch each other lightly &  
feel sick, awake.”* Prune-faced, pimpled, she puffs  
her body out as wall to wall canvas  
of stretched skin, so early, so slipped & those  
sauces drool down hard, down chins, jawlines.

Gossip in the morning, raised & splayed  
spray recoiling from her, no wish to sluice –  
*“Mine’s an oozing red,”* a sweetheart, a  
perpetual happening in the bowl  
beside herself & softly she is not  
a boy. Her better fingers dream of dressing.

Angular muttering squeezed between  
 soapy thighs & this room resists her, a  
 porcelain imprint as gift on her throbbing  
 personality. *"Clutch me clean, no crime, no crime..."*

A simple pill, a place to cup herself inside –  
 Whose insides? Whose production? Whose crime?

*"This is the good dark, the night-light dark."* Slippered  
 whispers, sleazy little simpatico hours,  
 moisture-beaded that private signal, adored.  
 eggs, semi-draped | beauty, half-dissembled  
 lavatory yellow, extra-lemon  
 a little fatter, flush – slow destiny.

we flinched again – you'll clear the glob – legs of blood,  
of satin stocking under plaintive offspring  
percolating in hose, tight, tighter still  
to whack me on the carriageway then nurse  
my wounds – the balconied, the abnormal,  
the slow destination, humming, humming.

*"Those awful sisters are the athlete of  
my hurt,"* the rigid door. the relentless  
ooze of summer, finding your intimate you.  
your singlehanded paperback, knees rising,  
head sinking down into the gray nausea pool.  
rib's noise engaged to crack, to gag & hum.

This is water worth pressing. *"All my wounds  
are in the front. My tear, my maxi-  
opportunity, nouveaux riches, shuffled-up  
deity, incantations at regular  
o'clock."* Cologne, toothpaste, leathery jilt  
against the cheeks of quick & boring men.

Mixed drinks, melodramatic moments –  
She, a non-fiction touch-machine  
Zigzagged animals, roller curls  
The uncomfortable significance  
of her blondness as heady pollen  
to be eaten now & seen again later.

Chin shadows curve the day away,  
Unhook her with scissors: bathroom exile.  
Thrust, sunny thrust, fisherman's snag,  
The comparative horror of a slipped rug  
Toweling skywards, splashing ochre  
Of left behind flesh up walls as wet paper.

She is naked, screaming, this is not a  
metaphor. To habituate or  
symbolize this thought is nothing less.  
You think of bathrooms as transitory  
places, but people can die there, humming,  
dark sun, slow destination, humming.

## SPRING FIRE

listening to the stifled crying.  
"Mitch," she said, "don't go. Don't leave me, please."  
"But you know what I am. I told you what I am in the  
letter."

"I don't care. Mitch, I don't care."  
"I can't stay with you. I won't feel right, I -"  
Leda put her hand on the girl's face and felt the tears.  
She turned her face and put her lips on the salty moist-  
ness. "Come on over to the bed," she said. "Get up, Mitch,  
and come on over to the bed."

Mitch lay down with her face buried in the pillow, and  
Leda sat on the edge, her hands stroking Mitch's hair.  
"Can you hear me, Mitch? Listen, it doesn't help to run  
away. You don't think it helps, do you? It doesn't help."  
"No," Mitch sobbed. "I can't stay here. I can't bear to see  
you every day and know what I'm doing to you."  
"What are you doing to me? What in hell are you doing  
to me?"

"I'm a lesbian," Mitch answered. "That's how I feel  
about you, too. I'm not like you - with Jake and every-  
thing."

"Oh, God, Mitch! All right, listen. I love you, you  
crazy kid. I don't have to label my love, do I? Do I have  
to say that it's lesbian love? O.K., then that's what it is.  
It's lesbian love, pure and simple. Ye gods, I've known  
about myself for years. I didn't run away. I didn't walk  
out and run away. You gave me plenty of reason to. You  
were the first one to come along and blow up my little  
plan for nothing the way I am. You think you're doing some-  
thing to me? Oh, Mitch! If anyone's doing it, I'm doing it.  
I'm doing it because I love you."

Mitch buried her head up from the pillow and turned  
over on her side. "But you said it," she said. "You said you  
couldn't love a lesbian. You said -"

"I said so damn much, didn't I? You've got to under-  
stand, Mitch. I don't like what I am. If I ever knew,  
I'd take a razor and slash my wrists. I couldn't live with  
people knowing, and pointing and saying 'poor' at me.  
No one knows but you, and I guess I never would have told  
you if you hadn't started to leave. Do you think it's easy to

*"i never was asked, never went  
to the bedroom –"*

my love is likened to a button  
[stronger it grew & in difficult places]  
& with terror she did undo

me in doorways, in mixed moments  
traced over & then lost again,

welling up, drinking dinner down.

folding in on each other as  
metal origami, we're scrap,

glory-glory,  
sloe-gin decanting,  
blood in our ears,

[go sloe, sloe  
like that daylight]

i left you pressed,

dreamin', wide open –butt look at

those queers,



have a sip at semi  
consciousness above me,

glazed, coming,

*body just averted to reach*

touch-spot,  
cheekbones to make your  
breakdowns seem natural, we'd  
be sick & pointless bobbing  
on adam's apples,  
HERE is the

*point at which we're alive so leave  
the boys alone. sorry mirror.*

i live to criticize  
 humble college of your  
 in my fingers,  
 hardly beating  
 unbold, bellies full of  
 snapp'd arteries raining  
 dumb desire, eyelids  
 static of open limits,  
 night stays in europe  
 & body! the unreal  
 surrealistic arms upon me,  
 this slow recess  
 irked by work &

or worship at the  
 snake i turn it over  
 this dark love this wow of  
 dumbness, us – us –  
 pearls & girdles,  
 on the world of  
 rotting from stricken  
 painless over  
 are what we long for,  
 of heavy heaven,  
 husky horns –  
 of every woman  
 getting down on that

happy happy hand.

i study now at the college of your  
 fingers my daily bread, my tryout horse,  
 sudden good-love, wooden solid,  
 to wake & wait to be each others'  
 second breakfast, lump & swallow &  
 she laid her voice down like a beat.  
 to raise, resist | to skirt | to hang strange

god around my sky lips pulling

off tops & bottoms, bedsprings billow

through the roots of childhood glory,

yr off-human, my everything thing,

sing like radio & casual

wombs worn inward. submission &

outbursting – push-pins, fish-eyes,

i hardly had time to die.

Each day a wall, a depression, a vacancy of infants. Put the mirror back, pour each into her to reconstruct the whole. Shed everything; pluck each of your eleven wings from your torso.

“form circles with your feet  
so you may better slowly sip  
or slack away from under  
our betterness”

She was away. She was the deal of the year. I guess the real spine of her began with blank remembrance. My worry flows liquid into sky as my uncertainty splashes on the floor. The first accent of possibility now prowls through each of us. We stuff the beginning into the end. Perhaps out of curiosity, the hours pile as décollage upon our quick or immense fathers. We pour the hate into –

At the beginning she would recall that each background was both understandable and beyond her control.

\* \* \*

*Concentrate on this  
silent attention until  
you start to loosen  
and ebb.*

\* \* \*

Consider the following:

a couple sucking monstrous  
the tyranny of infants  
the tears of the terrible

*I shrink  
to the size  
of this room  
with contains  
nothing but  
paper.*

from the start we were stuck  
to the staircase – the ascendance –  
drawn back      time & time  
again      to the kitchen  
of our wants, our duty  
to pickle or preserve  
what we had  
all along.

'I' is violently  
mine  
or  
yours.



it began with a carpet of courage  
it began with a series of thick titles  
it began with bodily discontinuity  
It began with walking to the window and opening

*bolt the door  
hide the floor  
each wall  
is swarming  
in.*

She is back at the house. She could almost smell the incomprehensible fashion as one winter gave way to another. She lay on the floor; the floor was one of the few places which held charm for her amongst the unemotional fragments of her life. Each crumb of space-time is a huddled minute.

\* \* \*

“darling what are these scraps of blue?”

\* \* \*

She lifts her legs in regular fashion and from her perspective she is bent walking on the ceiling. This pleases her as it removes her from the endless terror of furniture and dialogue.

Her last wish was the unfinished saturation in which we must leave her. The atmosphere is fluffed and melodious, but underneath beats a current of tense unbelonging, complemented by the streak of spilt lemony butter awaiting a slip, the fatigue of the protagonist, and the narrowing hallway which leads to the exit. The other side of the wall, a last rug is being cut to this rhythm. Cracks appear. This is the end of freedom meaning sentence.

at last we revolted and it was architecture

[END SCENE WITH A BACKSTEP]

As much of an alien to herself as  
the day you first saw her,  
and more terrifying as she must  
live with this shell for all the days  
of her life and never  
know why or what for.

THE END



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